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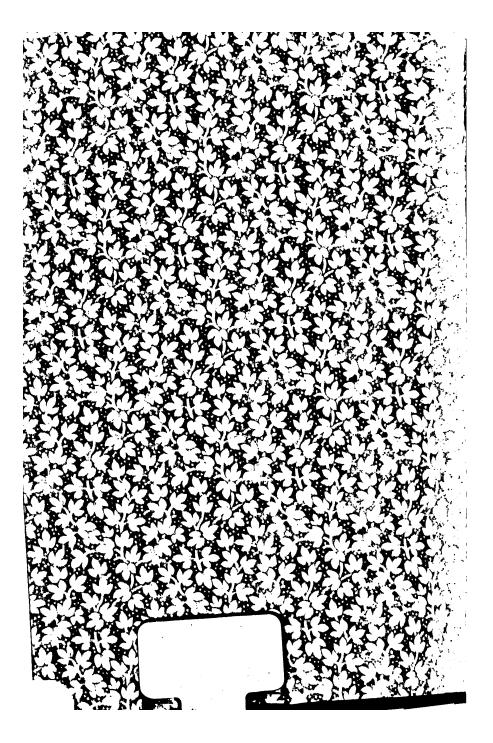
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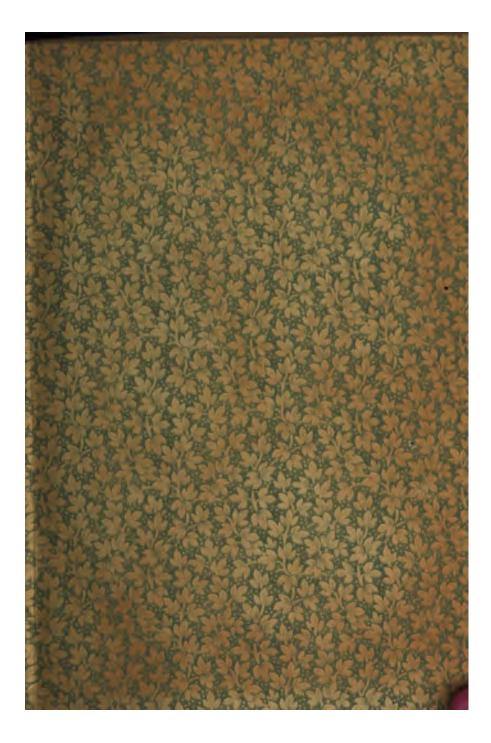
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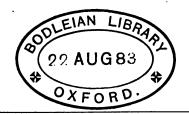
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ON FOREIGN SOIL

CHAPTER I.

CONCERNING MY HERO.

- 'Und die Tugend, sie ist kein leerer Schall;
 Der Mensch kann sie üben im Leben
 Und sollt'er auch straucheln überall
 Er kann nach der göttlichen streben,
 Und was Kein Verstand der Verständigen sieht,
 Das übet in Einfalt ein kindlich Gemüth.'
- 'Und ein Gott ist ein heiliger Wille lebt, Wie auch der menschliche wanke; Hoch über der Zeit und dem Raume webt, Lebendig der höchste Gedanke. Und ob Alles in ewigem Wechsel kreist, Es beharret im Wechsel ein ruhiger Geist.'

O Schiller sang; so many, after much wandering, sorrow, and hard experience have learnt

to believe; and so, too, Herbert Marley Vol. III.

was beginning to read life's meaning. Following Doctor Mackenzie's advice, and seeking rather to live up to the little he knew, than to 'fight his doubts' by dwelling continually on them, he yet ended by finding a 'stronger faith his own.' And of him the poet's words could be repeated, when he said,—

'And power was with him in the night, Which makes the darkness and the light, And dwells not in the light alone.'

The darkness had taught him lessons, which the light alone could never have brought home to him.

It is not my wish to weary the reader with too many quotations from the singers of various nations; still, let him bear with me yet a little more in that particular, because the language of those gifted ones is specially fitted to express the subtler shades of human feeling, and to portray the deeper knowledge, that the years bring to men. Believing this, I further cite three passages from another poet, which will illustrate, what Herbert had begun to see as true,—

'Oh fear not in a world like this,
And thou shalt know ere long—
Know how sublime a thing it is
To suffer and be strong.'

This was his first lesson; not an easy one. Then, having learnt to understand the elevating power of endurance under trial, in a way passing manfully through dark days could alone make him comprehend, a further unfolding was vouchsafed to him. He became aware that stoicism may make a brave stand, and yet recive no revelation interpreting to it the mysteries of existence, that remains as the special reward of him who, not having seen, believes.

'Faith alone can interpret life, and the heart that aches and bleeds with the stigma

Of pain, alone bears the likeness of Christ, and can comprehend its dark enigma.'

Then, with the consciousness of growth, the third lesson, one of consolation, came home to my hero,—

> 'For Thine own purpose Thou hast sent The strife and the discouragement.'

And now a few words regarding the career he had chosen.

He persevered in his work, and it brought its own pleasures to him in return. His fame got spread wider and wider abroad, and his compositions were pronounced to be unequalled by anything which had been given to the world, since the great German masters had gone to their graves.

What surprised people most was, not his genius, but that so young a man should have *lived* so much. Not only such great talent, but such diving into the depths of knowledge, so much trial made of the darker sides of life, such understanding of the need and possibility of comfort, spoke to the hearts of those, who listened to the music

of the Denesbury organist. This, at least, was what such said, as heard with their understanding. And they were right.

Herbert had lived much, though not very long, if we count by years. One saw it in the gravity, which had settled over his features, in the thought written on his broad brow. He was no longer a very young-looking man, and, though still handsome, had lost some of his boyish attractiveness; still, he had gained greatly in manliness of appearance, and though mostly serious, his countenance could light up wonderfully at times, especially when speaking to his mother, listening to Doctor Mackenzie, or play-

ing the organ; and 'his face broke to beauty as he smiled.'

Mention has been made of his musical labours, and the success attending them. They were crowned with the reward which, in some form or other, whether understood of men or not, must attend all good work; and in his case, this took the agreeable form of hearty appreciation from his fellow-countrymen. Indeed, his fame spread far beyond the British boundaries, other nations bringing him their laurel-wreaths of praise.

Even Germany was won over to believe in this English genius.

Ganzleck, the great Viennese critic, was heard to utter,—

'Dieser Engländer ist doch ein tüchtiger Musiker!

Johannli, the North German violinist, of European celebrity, kept down his national jealousy so far as to allow of the new composer, 'Er weiss was, man kann schon von ihm lernen.' Though, by way of a safety-valve for the not wholly repressible mental query, 'Can any good come out of England?' he added,—

'Man sieht wohl dass er bei unseren Meistern in die Schule gegangen ist. Seine Compositionen haben doch alle was Deutsches an sich.'

And most other countrymen of Johannli's agreed in the praise; all, in fact, who had not drunk so deeply of the spirit of Wag-

ner as to shiver at the thought of anything which approached absolute melody, as well as possessing exquisite harmonies.

In short, Herbert was on the high road to take his place amongst those who are held to be composers of undying fame; yet he himself was far from being satisfied. I do not mean satisfied with his achievements. If you are to believe in him at all, you will know he must of necessity have felt, his noblest musical utterances fell short of what there was to be expressed; but he was dissatisfied with the form his compositions had taken so far. Fully appreciating the sacredness of music, for this seems to express his feeling on the

subject better, than to say he preferred composing sacred music, he realised that fugues, sonatas, symphonies could none of them give the same scope for him to tell others what he had learnt himself, as freely and powerfully as the oratorio. It was therefore towards that form of musical composition that he had for some time desired to turn his endeavours.

But then, did not such an undertaking on his part seem, to put it dispassionately, a little out of place?

What would Denesbury, what would others happening to know about his former life, think of his venturing to write an oratorio?

And, to ask a more important question,

ought he himself to aspire to such an undertaking?

For a while he was held in bondage by these doubts. How unfortunate, some may think, that he should have allowed such a barrier to check his usefulness.

Perhaps, they who speak in this voice belong to the large class, who are mostly in a hurry, and, unconscious all the while of profanity, ready to act a little providence for themselves. They know nothing of the divine calm, which can afford to wait; nothing of the spirit, which counts days and years as things of small moment in the great work of building up humanity into a perfect whole.

They know nothing; truly, how little even the most patient among us know.

And, all the while, the waiting time was fitting Herbert more and more to produce an abiding work.

One day, at length, his heart, overflowing with his subject, forced him to speak of it to Doctor Mackenzie. He mentioned his strong feelings against, his yet stronger ones for attempting to bring out an oratorio, and the perplexity of mind resulting.

From his friend he received only encouragement.

'I cannot see why you should not try, though I don't wish for one moment to lessen the feeling of responsibility, which possesses you,' was Doctor Mackenzie's reply. 'And, I am certain, you will approach the work in at least as great a spirit of reverence as many would who write theological treatises with an aggressive dogmatism, which looks as if they thought life had no mysteries for them.'

Backed by such support, and recognising that the fact of being established as a church organist would undoubtedly influence public opinion as to his fitness, Herbert made up his mind to begin carrying out some musical ideas which he had long dwelt on, polishing and beautifying them, till they formed one grand piece of harmony.

This work, which could only progress

slowly on account of his many duties, grew very dear to him, an additional and weighty reason for his love for it being that it seemed to him as if he would feel, when it was completed, spiritually nearer to Blanche than perhaps ever before. He hoped she would be able to recognise in it a sign, that he had indeed passed through the 'cleansing fires,' and come out strengthened and illumined.

All this reconciled him to stay at Denesbury, though, excepting Doctor Mackenzie, there were no attractions for him in it, and other and, in a worldly point of view, better offers had been made him. At Denesbury he was certainly much occupied, but elsewhere he

might be yet more so. There, he at least had his quiet study in his mother's home, where her presence was restful to him, and she had become accustomed to dwell.

It had been a wrench to her to leave the Cottage, though various circumstances combined gradually to reconcile her to Denesbury, and he knew a fresh change would try her considerably. The last years had not gone by without leaving their mark upon her, though to the casual observer she still remained an imposing-looking woman, who could be fitly described as middle-aged rather than old.

Her figure was not quite as erect as

it once had been; her manner, to all but a very few, had increased in reserve. To her son, however, she was daily more helpful, more selflessly devoted.

Does it need to be written, how deep a joy stole over her as she watched the deepening and beautifying of his character?

I think not. The reader must understand that no one, excepting Blanche, could feel so keenly about it as herself; for no one had suffered so much when he erred; and even to Blanche, like opportunities of watching his wanderings and return had not been given, as to this faithful mother.

'Adelaide Marley, harsh and unlov-

>1

able.' Such is the verdict the world, if asked, would most likely write up against thy name.

And the recording angel?

Who knows but what, in spite of all the pride and haughtiness and many faults which go to make up the sum of thine unlovableness, his pitying verdict yet may be, 'Faithful and true?'





CHAPTER II.

AFTER FIVE YEARS.

IVE years had passed since that never - to - be - forgotten spring evening, when Blanche Stapele-

ton, walking back to the Croft with Herbert, after having escorted Mrs Rice and Miss Witherley on their way home, had felt conscience compel her to break off her engagement.

Five years, and many changes had come

in her home, in the parish, amongst friends and neighbours, but one thing remained unchanged, namely, the feeling in her heart that if not Herbert Marley's wife, she must ever remain unwed.

She had heard of his hard work, his successes, his devotion to his mother, and a little about his friendship with Doctor Mackenzie. This last knowledge had been a comfort to her; for, having received a very clear and faithful description from her mother of the character of the clergyman of Saint Cross, she felt sure that his influence over Herbert would be alike powerful and good.

She knew, too, that Herbert had re-

mained unmarried, and that no further rumours had got abroad either connecting his name with that of her cousin, Gretchen von Herberstein, or of any other young lady.

But all this information had reached her indirectly. She had been away from home each winter with her invalid aunt, who always spent the colder season on the Riviera, and during all those years she had only seen Mrs Marley four times. Twice she had gone to stay at the Cottage when Herbert was away in Scotland with the Challengers, and twice, on returning home from abroad, had found Adelaide Marley at the Croft. On the occasion of other visits ex-

changed between her family and Mrs Marley, Blanche had not happened to be present. Thus, though ever faithful in her heart, and constant in praying that the man she had loved so well, might be brought to the knowledge of the truth, she felt as if she knew but little of him—as if he were slipping further and further away from her. She never uttered his name; and even her mother rarely mentioned him to her.

And now, to speak of the changes which the years had brought.

Mary, as we know, was married, and had gone to her husband's vicarage in Cumberland, so that her visits to the Croft were rare.

Florry and Daisy were both out, the former rather fast, and wearying Blanche by the amount of parties to which she wanted to be taken; the latter already following in Mary's steps, by beginning a flirtation with her brother-in-law's successor to the curacy, and, consequently, displaying a great zeal for school and parish work.

Dick was in the Guards, leading a gay London life, and Bertie was at a tutor's, professedly making up for lost time and neglected studies ere matriculating at Cambridge.

Mrs Stapeleton was more of an invalid, more easily fatigued, less ready to receive visitors. In Colonel Stapeleton there was little change. Time had neither cured him of his pompousness nor of his ill humour, it had only thinned his hair and added stoutness to his figure.

Mrs Brotherton was dead; and I am afraid, if the truth be told, her parishioners rather rejoiced at her decease; for the rector had married again, taking for his second wife a widow with a large purse and a plentiful stock of goodnature. Some people said she had been Mr Brotherton's first love, but that their parents had put difficulties in the way of their union.

Mrs Rice and Miss Witherley had left the neighbourhood and gone to grace a suburban retreat eight miles from London; and the Portal was sold to a crusty old bachelor, who re-named it Woodbine Cottage, and swept away every vestige of high art decorations from the interior.

Great changes, too, had taken place amongst the neighbours, and such, as the Stapeletons felt keenly. The Curzons, some of their oldest friends, had taken a small house elsewhere and let their old place, Curzon Manor, because the eldest son's extravagance had rendered it imperative for them to reduce their establishment. And the Huntleys, who for generations had been intimate with the dwellers at the Croft, had shut up their picturesque

Elizabethan house, and gone abroad for the sake of a daughter's health.

All of this made a great difference in the Stapeleton's social life; nor was it rendered more pleasant by the fact of a great many Denesbury nouveaux riches taking or building houses near Wednesley, and often disgusting the old county families by their ostentatious display and general vulgarity.

Gaieties of a certain sort there were more than in by-gone days, and the regiments just then quartered in that part of the county gave many fêtes; but, with the exception of Florry, nobody at the Croft rejoiced at these facts.

As to Marley Priory, most of the

Stapeletons never went near it, if they could possibly help doing so. Blanche would often take a long round to avoid passing the gates, when out driving or riding in that direction; but sometimes, for the sake of those whose place was filled by a stranger, she would go over to the village and see Betty Pratt and others amongst the old people. of course, could not be entirely induced to hold their tongues about the new state of things; though Blanche always tried her utmost to change the subject, if they began upon it. They liked to talk of the good old times, when the squire, with his friendly smile and hearty speeches, walked about amongst them; and when Mrs Marley visited their cottages and inquired after their wants. Blanche was not even spared the account of how Master Marley played the organ at the church, 'for all the world loike a hangel.'

Old men and women shook their heads and declared they should never live to see such times again; and after much praise and many lamentations over the past, they invariably went on to tell how altered all was in the present. 'That'ere foreigneering chap as 'ad turned out Master Marley from the 'ome of his child'ood never came near any of the poor folk; but they 'ad 'eard tell enough of his nasty ways.'

In truth, the planter, whose health had completely broken down, lived a harmless

life enough; but his most innocent actions were misconstrued by the dwellers at Marley, because their hearts burned with indignation against him as an intruder, and their idea of loyalty to the late squire's family made them consider it a sacred duty to pick holes in him.

He did not neglect the interests of the estate, nor the wants of those who lived on the soil; though every arrangement was carried on through his agent. The reason was, that Spanish was much more familiar to him than English; another, that it was only when feeling particularly well, that he could get about the grounds on a quiet old pony, and the greater part of the time he was a much-tried sufferer.

Two things specially enraged the villagers. One was, that the intruder was a Papist, had a Roman priest to live in the house, and burnt incense in the Priory chapel. For this he was not forgiven, though he in nowise interfered with the services at the village church, nor any arrangements connected with them. That 'Master Marley' had introduced candles, and flowers, and sundry ritualistic accessories through his influence with the young vicar was conveniently forgotten; and a strongly Protestant feeling came over every one.

The other great sin of the new owner of Marley was the fact of possessing several negro servants and a large number of monkeys and foreign birds. Sometimes one of the pets got loose, and then there would be a hue-and-cry after it, and sundry black figures clad in gay colours appeared in the village in hot pursuit.

'Sure, ma'am,' Betty Pratt said to Blanche, 'saving your presence, I'm free to confess as I thought 'twere the devil himself, the first time I looked out o' my window, and saw a grinning face, as black as the kitchen chimney, a peering through at me from t'other side o' the pane; an' then 'e up an' knocks, an' begins a 'eathenish chattering as it warn't fit for a decent body to 'ear. So I cooms to the door wi' a broom 'andle, and I says, "Just you get out there," an' he runs off like mad.

Then, arterwards, I found as it were a great ugly ape as 'e was arter. Them niggers must be mighty cowards to roon away so fast 'cos an ole woman shakes a bit o' a broomstick at 'em. I 'spect as 'e as I took that chap for, would do the same, if we only showed a bit more spirit when 'e cooms to us wi' is nasty sergestions.'

And how has Blanche's own life shaped itself in the long interval since we saw her at the Croft, wearing a smile on her lips, and feeling a sad pain in her heart, as she watched Gretchen von Herberstein and Herbert Marley making friends at the piano?

Very quiet has the outward picture

seemed, very uneventful, altogether wanting in startling incidents. Like most lives of daughters in an English household, so Blanche's too has been, one of which there is little to tell, and yet full of discipline and teaching for her; and she has come forth out of it all a selfless, warmhearted woman, having rubbed off the few sharp corners formerly noticeable in her character.

No one looking into her gentle, controlled face can help reading there of some sorrow which has left its life mark on her, but has also brought to her a sweet graciousness, she would otherwise never have known. Friends say she has grown so like her mother; yet few of those who re-

mark this stop to consider the reason. It is because she, too, has passed through the furnace, and has come forth strengthened, and possessed of the secret how to apply the healing balm of sympathy to the wounds of other weary ones.

Many wayfarers, met with on life's way, has she had in her power, to comfort. There is something in her countenance which will make the shyest child run to her with its joys and griefs; and older people, sometimes even those who count many more years than herself, come to her with their perplexities, sure of a sound word of advice, or a loving one full of pity.

^{&#}x27;Blanche will put it straight,' Dick says

to himself, when the thoughts of unpaid bills and his father's wrath rise up to haunt him in the night.

Bertie consoles himself with the same reasoning when he inwardly resolves to devote himself to literature, and not to be ordained with a view to the living in his father's brother's gift, as Colonel Stapeleton fully intends that he should.

In short, Blanche is the family peacemaker, and specially beloved as such, because she does it cheerfully and without preaching. At the same time, what with great and increasing anxiety about her mother, and many troubles, both at home and in the parish, caused by her father's difficult temper, there have been many moments when her patience and fortitude have well nigh given way.

About two years after her engagement to Herbert Marley had terminated, a certain Lord Rendleswood met her at a garden party at Knowlesworth, and felt much attracted by her.

Only too soon Colonel Stapeleton became aware of this fact; and when Lord Rendleswood came six weeks later to make a long stay in the neighbourhood of the Croft, Blanche was subjected to much ennoyance by her father, who told her plainly that it was quite time she should think of her future prospects, and give up 'wearing the willow for a young fellow, who had evidently quite forgotten her.'

However, Blanche could, if necessary, hold her own with firmness, and she did it in that case, showing a quiet determination to resist all efforts to force her into a marriage; and though very angry for a long while, and making himself as disagreeable as he could, the colonel ended by seeing there was nothing to be done, and left her alone for the future.

'There is nothing so odious in a woman as obstinacy,' he remarked to his wife, who smiled to herself, without attempting to contradict him, and sought by her tact and tenderness to make up to Blanche for his behaviour. For herself, she would have been glad to see her daughter well married, still, constancy was a virtue she

prized, and perhaps she remembered her own young days too well, when her father had told her to marry Jack Stapeleton, and she had done it, to wish that any parental pressure should be brought to bear on the matrimonial choice of her girls.

Best of all would she have liked that all could be satisfactorily put straight, and that it should yet prove right and feasible for Blanche to be united to Herbert, in whom she had never ceased to feel a deep interest. Only, she knew, that even if the young man's feelings remained unaltered, whilst his opinions underwent such a change as would make Blanche's conscience at ease, Colonel Stapeleton would

still consider Herbert's new position a great barrier to their union.

Mrs Stapeleton herself held, that as long as there was enough for them to live on, and that the man was a true gentleman pursuing an honourable calling, there was no reason against any of her daughters following the dictates of love in the choice of a husband; especially as for each of them, due provision had been made in her marriage settlements.





CHAPTER III.

IN THE SUNNY SOUTH.

Stapeleton frequently spent part of her winters abroad, at some health-resort, for the sake of an invalid aunt, to whom the companionship of a young relation was the source of much comfort and pleasure. Indeed, Lady Mackenzie (she was a distant connection of our good friend the doctor's) was at times sufficiently infirm for it almost to be

a necessity for her to have someone, who was more companionable and took more interest in her, than her maid. She was a kind old lady, and would not dismiss Reynolds, who had served her more or less faithfully for ten years, because the woman was getting on in life, and not likely to enter easily into the requirements of a new situation. But, Reynolds, on her part, was not a favourite with her mistress's relations. they deeming her possessed of a great eye to the main chance, and by no means single-hearted, like many old servants, whom those, who are fortunate enough to be ministered to by them, rightly look on as amongst their greatest comforts and best friends.

Lady Mackenzie was no crabbed old dowager, rich alike in this world's goods and in whims, but a simple, loving woman, the widow of an Indian officer, and by no means overburthened with cash. Daughters she had none; her two sons, money being scarce, had found it needful to accept such berths as fortune provided for them, and one was in a banking-house in Singapore, whilst the other owned a sheep-run in Queensland.

As the delicacy of her chest rendered it needful for her to spend her winters in a warm climate, she rarely visited England, unable to afford the expense of the journeys to and fro, but spent the summers in whatever nook on the further side of the

Alps suggested itself as being at once tolerably shady, cool, cheap and get-at-able—a combination of qualities not too easily found in sunny Italy, where with a smile and a gracefully-turned compliment, the majority who come in contact with you, do their best to turn a more or less honest penny. All the while, you know you are being cheated; but then, they are so goodhumoured.

Lady Mackenzie, an accomplished linguist, and one who could enter readily into the modes of life and thinking of other nationalities, loved the handsome, impulsive Italian people, with their many faults and keen affections.

For a succession of winters, she roved

from one spot to the other on the Western Riviera, sometimes on the French and again on the Italian side of Ventimiglia; but she grew weary of this constant change, which did not admit of taking root anywhere; and decided, as it was her destiny to spend the larger part remaining to her of life on southern shores, that she would make a home there; and perhaps such a one, that with a judicious distribution of venetian blinds and closing of shutters, a summer, as well as winter, might be not uncomfortably spent in it.

To effect this end, she travelled along the entire Eastern and Western Riviera, avoiding the fashionable resorts, and visiting all the least known or frequented, till arriving at the spot, where she felt tempted to say to herself: 'Here, I will dwell!'

If you want to know where it was, pay great heed to the description, I am about to give of it; and then, like her, avoiding the winter-places, where there is a large foreign colony, start from Hyères to Leghorn, and you may possibly find it. I say possibly, as, for the sake of the lovers of quiet, who have in course of time taken up their abode there, I must try my best to lead you a little astray. They are only too sure, under any circumstances, to be invaded by the rush of indefatigable British tourists; and they look forward with pardonable terror to the time, when a lira will barely go as far with them as a few soldi now do; and when the simple-hearted folk they dwell among would brave the cattiv-occhio, or worse, risk the honesty of their souls for a buonamano; and when, instead of the lapping of the Mediterranean waves, or one of the strange, wild songs of the natives as their only music, promenade bands shall come to disturb the harmony of their solitude.

So to begin with—frankly confessing I am deceiving you, and that it is not its name—I will call the snug nest, where Lady Mackenzie chose to dwell, Sant' Eustorgio di Treva.

And now for its description, or rather an attempt thereat. To do it justice, one

would need to be poet and painter, as well as novelist, so favoured a nook is this among all the beautiful halting-places on Italian shores.

The old town, like almost all along that coast, stands on a height, and consists of a group of the most tumble-down houses conceivable. Its streets are of the steepest and narrowest, full of picturesque nooks and corners, where an artist could find numberless subjects for his brush. He need only wander about at will.

The queer old shops filled with country pottery, green, red, and of diverse colours, and all more or less quaint or graceful in shape; the women, carrying their copper kettles to be filled with water from the

market-place fountain, each wearing a gay handkerchief round her shoulders, and perhaps a natural flower in her hair, though otherwise but poorly clad; the mules with their bells and red-tasseled head-pieces, making their way cautiously down the roughly-paved streets, fully earning their reputation for sure-footedness and patience, though often over-weighted with boughs or heavy sacks filled with olives ready for the mills. The sight of all these would suggest subjects for pictures, highly characteristic of the place.

In the centre of the town is a piazza, in which a marble fountain stands, where cupids bathe their dimpled fists in the perennial stream; this is also the market-

square, the scene of much bargaining and shouting as each Saturday comes round. Here, too, a flight of steps leads up to the parish church, where the faithful crowd on all the *festas*; and whence the processions issue on Palm Sunday for the blessing of the palms, on Maundy Thursday for the laying in the Holy Sepulchre of the Sacred Host, and on the feast-day of the local patron-saint for the rendering of due honour to his pious memory.

The parish church, though the centre of parochial worship on great occasions, is not the only one in the place. Besides sundry shrines, and chapels scattered far and near, where the wayfarer can seek a moment's recollection, and repose in pass-

ing, there are several small churches; that of the contemplative order of sisters, who live by selling orange-flower water and embroidery; and, a little way from the town, that of the refuge for old men, kept by the good Capuchin monks, whose charity exceeds their cleanliness.

Close down by the shore, in a sheltered bay, are a few houses of a better class; there the syndic lives, and the doctor, and also one or two people rich enough to be designated as 'benestanti' and possessed of no occupation. There, too, is the Albergo della Spada Gloriosa, where Lady Mackenzie took up her quarters, when she came to inspect Sant' Eustorgio di Treva. Mine host of the Spada Gloriosa is a bit vol. III.

of a character, and (be it said sub rosa) no small bit of a revolutionist, or rather was in his younger days, when Italy was far removed from the unity and freedom it now possesses. It is for old memories' sake that he has chosen the warlike name for his inn. Some say, the sword referred to is Garibaldi's, and I will not answer for your not finding a well-worn red shirt and belt carefully put away in a recess of the old carved chest, which stands in Guiseppe Canobbio's private room.

However, now-a-days, he is as quiet and loyal a subject to Italy's king as it would be easy to find, and will shout 'Viva il Rè,' lustily, with the best of them 5

so his antecedents need not be raked up further. If we judge of him on the testimony of Lady Mackenzie, we shall believe him to be singularly obliging and goodhumoured, as well as full of suggestions of much practical use to her. For a few lire a day, he housed and fed her well, and spared no trouble, when she expressed a wish to have the most desirable building sites pointed out to her. At first she thought of erecting a dwelling for herself, which, though humble, as her means demanded, should be, as far as possible, in accordance with her ideas of comfort. This prospect, however, was soon abandoned. It seemed too great an undertaking for a solitary woman to superintend

the carrying out of her building plans, with no competent male friends to help her in urging on the procrastinating southerners. Besides, when all was finished, there was the danger of her finding the cost far exceed her estimate, and seeking redress would only be throwing good money after bad. In short, to buy a house already built, appeared likely to prove far cheaper.

An old *Palazzo*, once the property of the noble family of Speranza, was to be had for a wonderfully low price; it was exquisitely situated on a headland, commanding glorious views to right and left, yet sheltered by fine trees, and with olive-terraces and orange and

lemon - groves stretching down to the sea.

Once the *marchesi* di Speranza had been among the haughtiest of Italian nobles; now their direct descendant was a market gardener; and the creditors, into whose hands the property had passed, had waited too long for a purchaser, to demand a high price.

It was with regret, that Lady Mackenzie made up her mind to turn her back on the dream of a snug little villa of her own planning, and decided to buy the rambling old building, enchanting though its surroundings were. But the palace had both its peculiar charms and advantages, in addition to pecuniary ones. As regards

the grounds, she could farm them out, taking half the profits resulting from the sale of the olives and oranges, and the violets which grew beneath them, instead of rent. She could thereby add considerably to her income, and could still retain for her private use the space immediately round the house, where groups of palms and eucalyptus raised their stately heads, and mesembryanthemum grew in wild profusion, over the walls; and where the grateful soil would repay the planting of rose trees, mimosa, anemones, and escholzias, by soon supplying her with a wealth of flowers and blossoms.

There were points, too, about the old building itself which pleased her. It could undoubtedly boast of space and height, with its wide marble staircases, and large, lofty rooms. Further, it had two *loggias* overlooking the Mediterranean; one commanded an extensive coast-view of picturesque outline, of which the far, far distance looked, when bathed in soft pink or flooded with crimson, at daybreak and sunset, like some lovely dreamland.

Standing on the other *loggia*, one had no such panorama to gaze upon, and yet a very attractive, though more confined, picture.

From neither *loggia* was the old town of Sant' Eustorgio visible; that could only be seen from the back windows of the *palazzo*, and one *loggia* opened out

towards the south-west, whilst the other had an eastern aspect. From this second loggia, one had a view of the thick olive-woods stretching far down to the shore, excepting where an open space displayed some low, white houses, chiefly inhabited by fishermen. These, which were divided from the dwellings of the benestanti, by the Speronza foreland, bore the name of borgo de' pescatori; because, from time immemorial, those who lived there, earned their bread, for the most part, by the produce of their nets. was not a favourite spot amongst the inhabitants, and no one thought of settling there, to whom the nearness of the shore was not a special convenience.

The houses were amongst the most miserable in the paese, and the odours of refuse fish enough at times to breed fever amongst any persons not utterly hardened to them by long habit. This borgo de' pescatori abounded in squalid-looking children, clothed in indescribable rags; and the women were rough, and screeched and shouted at one another in a manner which made it hard for anyone hearing them to hold fast the belief, that Italian is one of the most musical of languages.

But this is the unlovely, unpoetical side of it all; and whoever was seated aloft on the eastern *loggia* of the Palazzo Speranza could look down from that lofty position in blissful ignorance of all this, whilst revelling in the picturesque aspect of the scene.

The dilapidated condition of these casupole,—I take the liberty of using the Italian word, because no combination of English names and adjectives can precisely render its meaning, and present so realistic and succinct a description of the borgo de' pescatori to the mind's eye,—the dilapidated condition of these casupole, I repeat, only served, at so great a distance, to enhance the artistic effect of the scene, to which they formed a background; so, likewise, did the rough frescoing and overgrowth of moss and maidenhair fern on some of them; so, again, the

broken arches and turretted bits, which here and there gave evidence of the town wall having once extended thus far.

The foreground varied a little according to the weather or time of day; at the worst seasons, the sands were deserted by all living creatures, and the boats drawn high up on the strand; but the scene oftenest presented to the eye was a livelier one; groups of swarthy fishermen, barearmed and bare-necked, and wearing pointed red caps, were to be seen most days busy at their calling, either spreading their nets to dry, or seated, mending them, on overturned boats; or perhaps standing in a circle to haul in a draught of fishes.



CHAPTER IV.

MAKING A NEW HOME.

men, the rich brown tints of the boats, which had weathered many a storm, the bright blue of the laughing skies, the deeper colouring of the waters beneath, the subdued tints of the olivewoods, the tumble-down houses of the borgo, looking like little more than white specks as viewed from the Speranza foreland; in short, all that has been

in some measure described in the last chapter, how attractive it all was to such a lover of the beautiful in art and nature, as the widow of the late Sir Eric Mackenzie.

Her feeling for such things was so deep, that one sometimes wondered what a woman possessing these tastes so strongly, could have found in a big, gruff soldier, who had himself often declared, that he did not understand 'poetry and all that sort of thing.'

If poetry meant the intricacies of verse-making and rhyming, there is no doubt he would have felt no more at home in the contemplation of them, than a 'bull in a china-shop,' as he

most likely would himself have expressed it in the homely language, which it was his nature to use. But, if poetry means to live nobly, to die bravely, to keep a heart and conscience pure amid many temptations, to hold fast a lofty idea of life in spite of all the disenchantments of the world, to be loyal, and faithful, and true; then indeed, Eric Mackenzie knew more of these things than many a would-be poet, who dreams in his study of lovely things, and leaves the doing of them to others.

Ask any of the women (if they can speak of those times) who went through the Indian mutiny; be they of humble or high degree; ask those, who were little ones then, and they will tell you with tears of a young officer, who, under circumstances not to be dwelt upon further in these pages, helped them with the strength of a man, and the tenderness of a woman.

And since then, when in one of our more recent wars, Sir Eric, fighting with a gallant handful against fearful odds, was struck, and fell, and died, his last words being—'Don't let them through, my lads, don't let them through,' do you not believe, if the unseen spirits hovering round us know aught of poetry, it proved true in his case, as in many another, that

^{&#}x27;The sweetest tears, which angels shed, Falls on a soldier's unburied head.'

Lady Mackenzie believed it, and the memory of this noble life was lovely to her and to her boys, whom it has helped to make good men themselves.

But, whilst I have allowed my thoughts to linger lovingly with the glorious dead, I have wandered far away from my subject, far away from sunny Italy, to where a tropical sun beats down fiercely on an arid hill-side; and now I ask you, reader, to retrace the road with me to the eastern loggia of Palazzo Speranza, and look down once more on the borgo de' pescatori as there is one more feature in the scene to be pointed out for the further elucidation of my story.

Look, beyond the borgo, about a mile

and a half-at a group of palm trees; a little way above them, crowning a hillock, a roughly-hewn cross stands out against the clear, blue sky. Close by are a ruined archway, some remnants of walls, and a well once belonging to a monastery now only the home of bright green lizards, and manifold insects, but still bearing the name of Sant' Eustorgio di Treva, the saint, who brought the gospel to these parts. A spot rich in natural beauty and with a lovely outlook, therefore much admired by such wandering artists as chance to leave the beaten track and pass that way. Many legends of the miraculous cures, the godly deeds, the marvellous asceticism of the good VOL. III.

monks once dwelling there, weave their halo of memories, precious to the dwellers on the soil, around this spot; but, perhaps the story connected with it, which is dearest to their hearts, is one of later date, one of something which happened within the memory, of some of the older among them. What it was, you will learn by-and-by. Lady Mackenzie and other old friends, with whom the reader of these pages has grown familiar, have also yet to hear why the people of the paese are so fond of 'la croce di Sant' Eustorgio,' and often linger at the old shrine for a moment as they pass to and fro, to say a bater noster 'for the rest of Assunta's soul.'

There is so much to tell about Lady Mackenzie's arrival at Sant' Eustorgio, and how she settled down in the Palazzo Speranza, and made the old building into a habitable dwelling-place, that it becomes necessary to cut short descriptions; yet the dreamy sweetness of these southern climes tempts one to linger in the contemplation of all their charms, amongst which one learns, only too readily, the delights of dolce far niente, and of putting aside active work, simply to give one's-self up to the enjoyment of existing amid so much loveliness.

Very fascinating, no doubt; but the people of the country are already sufficiently imbued with this spirit, and so reckless in their waste of time as to make it doubly necessary for any one amongst them to guard against it, who wants to get work satisfactorily done. And this was what Lady Mackenzie found, when she began to put her new home in order.

Workmen, painters, those helping in the arrangement and construction of furniture, all needed equally constant driving and watching over, or she perceived it would take the term of her natural life to get things done.

Fortunately, though so far from strong, she was a woman of great spirit and activity, and as a soldier's wife had found ample opportunity for the further development of these qualities.

Having spent a winter for the third time at Nice, and having come to the conclusion that, owing to its exposure to wind, one could catch cold there more easily than in many less sunny places, she had finally decided to hunt for herself. The result was the discovery of Sant' Eustorgio di Treva, where she found herself in the middle of April, and was charmed by its situation, its unfrequentedness, and the many flowers which grew in its environs.

If she had a hobby, it was botany; and, other things being favourable, I think what settled the question of her

taking up her abode at Sant' Eustorgio, was the entrance of Reynolds one morning, just as she was debating the matter in her mind, bringing a variety of the orchis tribe, and other flowers, which she was not prepared to name.

Shortly after this, she made an offer, through Guiseppe Canobbio, for the old home of the Speranza family, and, after a considerable amount of bargaining, got it for the price she named.

To furnish it cheaply, comfortably, and yet in keeping with the style of the country, was her next object. And she succeeded in doing so.

Matting and carpets, and some of the more solid requirements in furniture,

were brought at the least expense from a distance; but she wished as far as possible to encourage local trade and talent. The pottery of the country was to be bought both for use and ornament, the large-patterned chintz veils worn by the women in festal processions were utilised for curtains and hangings; and a young painter, glad to work at a low rate, was allowed to do a good deal of frescoing on walls and ceilings; so that delicious melons, peaches, figs, Japanese medlars, oranges, and lemons met the eye at every turn, looking tantalisingly natural, as well as trailing smilax, manyshaded boughs of eucalyptus, and the graceful pepper-tree.

'All labour is cheap here, now,' Lady Mackenzie said, in writing home to a friend; 'therefore what I do for my new possession, I wish to be done well. Land and property will greatly rise in value here by-and-by; and the palazzo will prove a valuable investment for my boys.'

The chief industries of the place, with the exception of the borgo de' pescatori, were working in olive wood and lacemaking. Between these two occupations the energies of the male and female population were respectively divided; boys and men being busily engaged in carving, adjusting, or inlaying the former, whilst the womankind, from seven years old to seventy, were to be seen from 'early morn till dewy eve' seated at windows, in arch and doorways, in the middle of the street, by the fountain in the market, on the strand—everywhere, in short, plying their bobbins, and turning out piece upon piece, with wondrous rapidity, of black, white, or cream-coloured lace, made of thread or silk, and of various degrees of fineness and coarseness.

Most, both of the lace and wood work, was bought up by dealers at a low rate, and sold for a high price in many places, where strangers congregated.

There were no regular shops for the sale of these things in Sant' Eustorgio itself. The population was too poor to

afford any display; nor would the outlay have benefited them, as there was no one to act purchaser; and each individual or family worked alone. Therefore, Lady Mackenzie found that, at a cost which barely amounted to what she would have paid elsewhere for things far less pleasant to the eye, she could trim. pillow-cases, curtains, and sofa-backs with real lace, of stout make and handsome pattern; and indulge in tables and étagéres of plain olive wood, or such as was inlaid with charming designs, in which the diverse colours of the orange, lemon, fig, and caroubier trees had been skilfully intermingled.

Much had to be ordered in the spring,

when she first bought the property; and she was too wise to think of leaving the Spada Gloriosa till all seemed fairly set going. When the heat of June drove her away, she started for England, knowing it might be years ere she would again have another opportunity of revisiting it, and before leaving, earnestly charged her kindly host to look after her interests, which he faithfully promised to do, and did.

At the end of October she was back again, and found a good deal still to be done, in spite of Signor Canobbio's activity; so, set steadily to work to get her new home thoroughly arranged before the shortest days arrived, and her inveterate enemies, asthma and bronchitis, began their persevering attacks.

She had been at the Croft, and had hoped to bring Blanche back with her, not for merely selfish reasons, but because she thought her favourite niece looked in need of change, and was too overburthened with family responsibilities.

Mrs Stapeleton had rallied considerably of late, and the doctors spoke more hopefully of her than they had done for years. This gave hopes of Blanche's being able to go abroad later on; though she would not consent to start with her aunt.

'If Mary comes to take my place for the winter, I will join you, Aunt Margaret.' Those had been her last words, as the carriage, which was to take Lady Mackenzie to the station, drew up at the hall-door of the Croft.

Whether Mary came or not, depended on her husband's getting an army chaplaincy and going abroad to a foreign station. If he did so, his wife was not to join him till the spring, and to spend the winter with her child at the Croft.

The north country had not agreed with either of them; and they had longed for some time for a change, but not found it easy to accomplish. They might have been forced to stay on for years at their Cumberland vicarage, had not circumstances called the attention of the general

in command of the district, to the rector's peculiar talent for speaking to and influencing soldiers, ending in his advising him to devote himself more particularly to that line of work.





CHAPTER V.

BLANCHE GOES ABROAD.

EAR AUNT MARGARET,—If all is well, I shall be with you on Thursday, at 3.30 p.m.'

So Blanche wrote to Lady Mackenzie one day in October. And when Thursday and the hour mentioned came, she was at Sant' Eustorgio.

Despite of her long journey, she showed no signs of fatigue; and the afternoon had advanced little, before she was already suggesting and helping to carry out sundry improvements in the arrangement of the *palazzo*, which were likely to contribute very considerably towards her aunt's comfort.

It seemed as if she were destined to bring brightness, and a sense of rest wherever she went. Even the sunshine of south rooms on the Riviera seemed enhanced by her presence; and Reynolds' usually sour visage wore something faintly approaching a smile, 'because Miss Stapeleton had come.'

'I am in special need of your wise hints and help, my dear,' Lady Mackenzie said, as she watched the lithe, active form of her niece moving about the room, measuring how this and that bit of furniture could be most advantageously placed, 'in special need of your help, because, though you may scarcely believe it, in this out-of-the-way place, I am expecting visitors.'

'Visitors, Aunt Margaret! What dissipation; I see now, why you have been so anxious to have a place of your own just to begin a series of gaieties.'

Lady Mackenzie laughed heartily, knowing that nothing had been in reality further from her ideas, and that no one was better aware of it than Blanche.

'Well, you saucy niece,' she rejoined,
'be that as it may, I am expecting visitors
now, and I don't believe you will find it
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easy to guess who they are. "Je vous le donne en quatre," as Madame de Sevigné says in one of her letters—letters, my dear, such as the introduction of the penny post will never allow of the world's seeing again.'

'Oh, I shall never be able to guess. I hope it is not the old lady who was so fond of coming to see you at Nice, and strewed her path with tracts and leaflets till, as Bertie would have said, it seemed as if she designed having a paper-chase.'

'No, most profane young person; nor yet my old French friend, who always greeted me with a smile of satisfaction from behind his newspaper, and was in high glee if he could say there were "Encore des horreurs et des crimes mystérieux" to be found in its columns. However, as you are not likely to guess, I may tell you. My guests are to be your cousin Gretchen, née Herberstein, and her husband, Count Halm-Halm. They have been at Naples and Rome, and come here before going home to Germany. They cannot promise me more than the inside of a week, and I look to you to lionise them wherever I cannot go myself, though I hope to have some pleasant boating excursions with you all.'

'Very well, I shall be delighted. If Gretchen is as pleasant a companion as she used to be in old days, my task won't be a hard one. I have not met her since she paid us that visit at the Croft, excepting one day at Nice with you. Count Halm-Halm I have never seen. What is he like?'

'Oh, the exact type of a Prussian officer—stiffness, glasses and all; somewhat pedantic, and greatly imbued with the notion of the superiority of his nation to any other. And he is for ever making profound bows, and saying "Auf Ehre, meine gnädige Frau," with that rasping utterance, which makes my throat feel sore when I hear it. However, his German is preferable to his English, which is execrable, though rather amusing.'

'You are not drawing a prepossessing

picture, Aunt Margaret. What in the world induced Gretchen to take him? It is so unlike anything she led me to expect, being so wonderfully independent for a German girl.'

'My dear, you saw her in England, when her momentary schwärmerei, as she probably called it, was to try and be as English as possible. When she was back with her mother, and brought under German influence again, all advanced ideas had to be given up, or were only brought out to be recounted as characteristics der wunderlichen Engländer. I say, brought under German influence, though her mother is your father's sister; for the last nationality to which anyone

would be likely to guess that the elder Countess Herberstein belonged would surely be English. Everything done in her own country is a matter of curiosity to her, and she speaks the tongue of the land of her birth in a very queer fashion, interlarding it perpetually with foreign words, and translating, literally, from other languages. How could it be otherwise? Since she was seventeen, I don't think she has ever been more than a fortnight in England, and abroad has kept almost entirely amongst foreigners. I myself should never have known her but for her near relationship to your father.'

Blanche stopped in her occupation of

trying to make a refractory picture hang straight, to turn and look at the speaker. She felt glad that, whilst wonderfully free from prejudices and full of ready adaptability to foreign life, the little, round woman before her, with those bright eyes and that ready smile, that pretty cap and those dainty frills, had always remained so unmistakably English.

'I am still wondering at Gretchen's choice, Aunt Margaret,' she said, meditatively. Probably her thoughts could not help wandering back to the rumour which had connected her cousin's name with that of Herbert Marley; and to think after that of her being contented with such a

stick, as Lady Mackenzie had described seemed passing strange.

'Choice, my dear,' her aunt went on.
'She had no choice in the matter. You
don't suppose well-brought-up German
girls are allowed anything of the kind?
It was all arranged for her, and probably,
though I have been picking him to pieces,
Count Halm-Halm has many good points.
He is patriotic, and proved in the FrancoGerman war that his ardour was not all
talk. You know, Blanche, I always have
a warm corner in my heart for a good
soldier.'

A grave, far-off look stole over the old lady's face for a moment; then she continued,—

'And I believe he is really very domestic, and makes Gretchen a good husband, though he is just a little tiresome now and then. It was all arranged last year at Nice, as you may remember, when the Herbersteins had that delightful villa on the Brancolar road. Of all the roads about there, I think that the prettiest—the masses of geraniums and heliotrope peeping over the gardenwalls make it so bright.

'But I must finish telling you about Gretchen. As she was several years over twenty, her marriage was becoming a serious question with her foreign relations. Soon, according to German ideas, she would be an old maid; and, you know, to be that is worse than a sin in the Fatherland.

'At the same time, Count Halm-Halm was looking out for a wife. He was an officer of good family, and with interest, but no money. However, the relations on both sides approved of the match being made up, and the count came on inspection. To my notion, Blanche, the whole affair was most comical; and the excitement Gretchen's mother was in amused me immensely.

'Count Halm - Halm had only a week to spare, but by the end of that time said "liebe mamma, liebe Gretchen," quite naturally. In short, it was all settled, and you would have thought

they had known each other all their lives.'

'Oh, Aunt Margaret, all this is very interesting to me, and very strange! How differently things turn out to what one expects!'

Was there a touch of sadness in Blanche's voice as she made this remark? Was she allowing her mind to linger regretfully with the past? Most likely. Indeed, it could hardly be otherwise.

Anything recalling her cousin Gretchen's visit to the Croft must of necessity bring a host of recollections in its train.

Ah, yes! Blanche was strong and selfless; and, in the eyes of most people,

she had 'got over' the breaking-off of her engagement. Yet it was not so: it could not be. In her secret heart. she still clung to the hope of a happy future springing up out of the ashes of the past for herself and for him to whom she remained faithful and true. If Herbert could come back, after it mattered not how many years, and, looking frankly into her eyes, say, 'Take me; I have seen my error, and henceforth your God shall be my God;' or had he but come without saying this, she would have been ready to go with him and be his wife; for she knew he believed in her resolute purpose, and would not come unless the Light had shone into his soul, for

which her constant prayers were being offered.

The Halm-Halms came when expected, and he was just as Lady Mackenzie had described him—stiff, pedantic, and full of the greatness of his Prussian Fatherland. His wife was bright, ready-tongued, and prepared to be interested and charmed by all she was shown—in short, une femme charmante.

I feel scarcely bound to apologise for the use of so untranslateable a phrase. Does our English 'a charming woman' in any way convey the same impression to us as the French rendering, or recal the ladies of our acquaintance so vividly, other in the future, and were happy in doing so — well and good; if not, the days spent together at Sant' Eustorgio would always remain, as a pleasant recollection. So the time of the Halm-Halm's stay at Palazzo Speranza was a happy one for all its inmates; and his bride's many attractions even cast a glamour over the unattractive officer.

'Hier lasset uns Hütten bauen,' Gretchen quoted to her husband aptly, if somewhat flippantly, as they stood on the eastern loggia, on the first evening of their arrival. Lady Mackenzie and Blanche had taken them there, that they might look down on the borgo de' pescatori and

admire the peaceful aspect with which the soft, half-light endowed it.

Count Halm-Halm, though content with his quarters, and ready to be pleased with his visit, did not see matters quite in the same light as his wife, so he answered—

'Hier ist es zwar sehr schön Liebe, doch auf die Dauer wäre es mir doch gemüthlicher, daheim in Pommern.'

To Gretchen, the anticipation of being installed as *Gutsherrin* amid the marshes of a Pomeranian estate, was not blissful. Therefore she promptly changed the subject, knowing her lord and master's argumentativeness, and prepared to enjoy the present, to the utmost.

'How charming this prospect is, dear vol. III.

Lady Mackenzie,' she remarked, turning to her hostess. 'See the cross standing out against the sky,—what an exquisite point of view that must be!'

'It is one of our lions, to which I hope we may all be introduced at a very early opportunity. I have not yet had time to visit it. But there is a wonderful story attached to it, and my good friend, Guiseppe Canobbio of the Spada Gloriosa, the best inn Sant' Eustorgio possesses, has promised to row us round to the headland in his boat, and tell us the story. The road is rough, and I think boating in this weather altogether pleasanter than walking, and we have no carriages here. What do you think of this idea?' Lady

Mackenzie inquired, turning to Count Halm-Halm

Whatever you arrange, miladi, will be undoubtedly the pleasantest,' came in grimly polite utterance from the lips of the Prussian uhlan, accompanied by an inclination of his head, which rivalled the formality of his speech.

'Ah, that dear Egon of mine; one would think he was always on parade,' Gretchen said, in an undertone, as she drew her arm through Blanche's, and led her cousin away to the further side of the loggia, out of earshot of Lady Mackenzie and the count. 'But he is really at heart what you call a "good fellow" in England. You must learn to know him.'

Then she drew Blanche down into a seat, and said, with something of the old girlish impetuosity,—

'Now, tell me about the Croft and all your people. Oh, I am dying to hear about it all. Those were happy days; some of the happiest I have known.'

A shadow flitted over Blanche's face. Yes, they had been happy, very happy days,—at least some of them. But then there lay the pain of talking of them. It was all so long ago; it had so utterly passed away; and now, though repining was no use, things were not so happy. Then, life had been a picture, with its dark parts and its light; the shadows only enhancing the beauty of the brighter.

portions. Now, it was more like a photograph, all subdued tones, blending harmoniously, but wanting colour. This might make the shadows, perhaps, seem less dark; but then, on the other hand, the golden light, the glorious colouring, which had more than made up for the deep shadows, was gone. Blanche was no longer a girl, full of youthful fancies; yet, for all that, she was not without a hope, as has been hinted, that a magic touch might yet turn her life's sombreness into a lovelier picture again. This hope, however, was usually kept so tightly locked up in her inmost heart, that no one even of her nearest and dearest was allowed to penetrate there. Yet the door of this closed shrine was

opened, in part at least, to the skilful knocking and persuasiveness of her cousin. Blanche did not own to herself that she had confessed to anything, yet an hour later, when she and her aunt had changed places, and she was listening to a glowing description of the march into Paris, as witnessed by Count Halm-Halm, Gretchen seized on the opportunity to tell Lady Mackenzie that she was undoubtedly pining, though putting a brave face on it, and that her heart was still wholly given to Herbert Marley.

'Of course you see this yourself,' she added, in a tone which implied that her hostess must necessarily be more keensighted than herself about the matter, though she in reality felt convinced that it was not so. Only she knew enough of human nature not to put it in that light to one, whose sympathies she was eager to enlist as thoroughly as possible in the discovery. And why did she want to win over Lady Mackenzie? Because she knew her to be the one person likely to help, and was eager she should do so; for Blanche's utter faithfulness had touched her, and turned what, in the first instance, had been a surface interest, into a heartfelt one.

Time, and the whirl of fashionable society, had still left her the warm feelings of the Gretchen of old days, only had made it more difficult to rouse them.

'My dear,' said Lady Mackenzie, in an inquiring tone, when her guest had spoken at some length on Blanche's good qualities, and laid much stress, on what a pity it would be if a woman, who would make such a splendid wife, were not married to the man to whom she remained so true,-'My dear, I would do anything to make Blanche happy, if I could; but how can I possibly interfere in such a matter? I have met Mr Marley once, and that is all. seemed charming. All the same, you know the breaking-off of the engagement was Blanche's own doing, and I fully believe she acted rightly. They differed on very serious matters.'

'I know,' answered Countess Halm-

Halm. 'You English are terribly orthodox. We are quite different. Sometimes Catholic families don't like alliances with Protestant ones; only then there is generally some old jealousy at the bottom of it. But, whether a young man is orthodox or not in his opinions does not trouble the girl, for whom he proposes. Why should it? We know beforehand, they none of them are. If a father is very particular, he says a few words to the gentleman who comes to beg for the hand of his daughter, that is all; and it is prettier and more correct in good society to have a religious ceremony as well as civil.'

Lady Mackenzie shook her head.

'I hope you are overstating things, dear

Gretchen. 'If not, God help Germany,' she said, gently. 'At any rate, you know it is not so in England, and particularly, not in Blanche's case.'

'Well,' Gretchen continued perseveringly, 'Mr Marley may have come round to her views by this time; and, if so, what a pity to spoil two lives for reasons belonging to the past.'

'Something ought surely to be done to bring these two good people together again, and if any one can do it, you are the one with fingers skilful enough to handle the intricate threads of their fate.'

'Ah, my dear,' was the reply, 'that is the last thing I am fond of doing. It is said, not to be a bad trait in a woman to be somewhat of a matchmaker. Yet, I have known it bring evil, and never good.'

'Dear friend, there are exceptions to every rule, and I have a presentiment this will be one of them.'

These words were accompanied by a winning smile, and a pressure of the hand, of which the speaker well knew the persuasive force.

The idea began to present itself in a not altogether unpleasant light to Lady Mackenzie. After all, if a little effort on her part would bring so great a joy to her dear niece, it could not be wrong to make it. Only, how was she to set about it, grant-

ing that it was right? All she knew of Mr Marley was, that he was organist at the Victoria Hall at Denesbury, and, as far as she was aware, unmarried and free. But of Denesbury, and all concerning it, she was ignorant, excepting that her cousin Christopher had a parish there, and that she would have gone to stay at his house, but that he had gone to London, that his wife might consult a doctor there, just when she happened to be in their neighbourhood.

Truly, a very small connecting link; yet, if on consideration she made up her mind to take any steps in the matter, it might answer her purpose. For the present, she put it all aside with—

'I must think about it,' and talked of other things, though her heart warmed towards Countess Halm-Halm for the interest, she took in Blanche's welfare.





CHAPTER VI.

PADRE FRANCESCO.

HE following day was all that could be desired for boating, warm and bright, yet not too fiercely sunny.

A light breeze took off from the heat, a few soft, fleecy clouds, almost welcome sights on the Riviera, added to the beauty of the sky. There was but a slight ripple on the sea; in short, Lady Mackenzie felt tempted to say,

as the party assembled at breakfast in one of the loggias,—

'If you are all willing, and my good friend Canobbio will bring his boat, I don't think we could do better than go to Santa Croce to-day.'

All proved willing, and in answer to a message, the landlord of the *Spada Gloriosa* declared himself happy to be at their service.

Only those who have been favoured enough to enjoy the pleasure, can tell how delightfully an autumn afternoon can be spent on the Mediterranean waters. At midnight, and more than once, as late as the end of December, Blanche had been rowed across Villa-

franca harbour, when returning from some gay reception on board one of the ships stationed there, and had revelled in the softness of the air, whilst bestowing a pitying thought on her people at home, who were plunged in the depths of an English winter. Consequently, when Count Halm-Halm asked if it were not a little late in the year for the proposed excursion, she laughed, and assured him there was no danger, unless, if the heat increased, of sunstroke.

Shortly after one o'clock that afternoon, Guiseppe Canobbio moored his boat at the foot of the Speranza foreland, to wait whilst the party from the palazzo came down through olive groves to join him.

'Your servant,' he said, in his sonorous voice, as they trooped into sight; 'the ladies must excuse the poorness of my craft. We don't keep pleasure-boats, as yet, at Sant' Eustorgio.'

It was true that the big boat was merely a rough one for fishing, in which some well-scrubbed benches had been placed; but Count Halm - Halm soon made it sufficiently comfortable for the ladies by a skilful arrangement of shawls and cushions, and offered himself to assist Guiseppe in taking an oar. All the same, whether its or his own clumsiness caused his helplessness, he was very

ready to resign, when, after a while, his wife remarked, smiling,—

'Das kannst du nicht, Egon, lass es lieber sein.'

For he answered,—

'Allerdings. Ich blamire mich nur,' then, ceasing the attempt to row, contrived to stow his lengthy limbs away in a very small space in the stern. After that, there was little conversation for a while; they were all enjoying themselves too much, to care to talk.

Canobbio was the first to break silence.

'Do you wish to see the well,' he asked, 'where the blessed saint slaked his thirst, when he arrived here after his long wanderings, and looked down on the borgo di Treva?'

'Surely, Signor Guiseppe, surely. We want to show all our wonders to my guests,' Lady Mackenzie answered in fluent Italian.

'Va bene.'

Then he intimated that it was better to land a little further along the coast, than if only going to see the cross. The way would be longer and also steep; still it would repay them. There was a fine view, and the well was prettily situated among palm trees. Besides, the remains of the old monastery were very picturesque; they might see all this, and go up to the cross afterwards, if this suited the ladies.

It all sounded very tempting. Ac-

cordingly, the programme was accepted, and Count Halm-Halm helped the ladies to step ashore, whilst the boat was being made fast by its owner.

Long descriptions of scenery are wearisome to those who have no acquaintance with the places, which the writer is trying to paint for them, and to those fortunate enough to know those sunny Italian shores, the pictures of them which they carry enshrined in their hearts are better than any written recollections. Wanderers on the Riviera know many a spot similar to the well of Sant' Eustorgio di Treva. Perhaps some who read these lines may have seen the very place itself, halting beside

it, weary and footsore, like the ancient hermit, seating themselves on its ageworn edge, grateful for the shelter of the palms grouped round it, and for some drops of the water it contained. And even to such as had not been fatigued by a long day's march, a seat beneath waving palms, and amid so much beauty, would not be likely to come amiss.

'Reizend, entzückend,' came from Egen Halm-Halm's lips. 'Nun liebe Frau, geht es wieder an das Hütten bauen nicht wahr?'

The tall uhlan was beginning to unbend a little, and one sign of it was his having almost given up his attempts at English, which he was not capable of rendering either very plain or pleasant to the ear, and contenting himself with seeking expression in the language of his Fatherland.

'Even our foreign despatches are to be written in German now,' he had said, by way of apology, to Lady Mackenzie, 'so I only follow the example of my superiors, in expecting those of other nations, to be ready to receive my communications in my own tongue.'

And then, an agreement had been arrived at, whereby he was to be allowed to talk German, whilst contented to receive answers in English, if those he addressed preferred giving them thus.

Blanche possessed the truly English talent of being able to make an exquisite water-colour drawing; a gift the frequency of which amongst Britons, in comparison to other nations, had caused Gretchen von Herberstein to express her conviction one day at the Croft, that all English people were born with paint-brushes in their hands. Lady Mackenzie owned sundry landscapes, mementoes of her old home, done by her niece, and the sight of fresh loveliness made her wish for an addition to her collection.

'Blanche,' she said, 'my new drawingroom will not be complete without a picture of this delightful spot. May I hope for one?' 'Some day, perhaps, Aunt Margaret. I shall have to get into practice before I can attempt anything so ambitious. The great beauty of this place lies in the colouring; and to harmonise it is no easy matter. I will try the old monastery first. That archway is curious, and the views, looking through on either side, are extremely lovely.

'Well, my dear, I shall be glad of a drawing of each one, with a peep at the purple mountains yonder, and another looking back on the borgo de' pescatori.'

'Erlauben sie, meine Gnädigste,' and Count Halm - Halm wrapped a shawl round the shoulders of his hostess.

'Ah, a thousand thanks. A hint that

we must not linger here too long, if we want to see the old cross, "hear its story," yet get home before sunset. Come, let us start on our pilgrimage. We can see the view even better from above.' This to Blanche and her cousin, who were having a last look at the coast-line.

Blanche was curious to hear Assunta's story. She took an unfeigned interest in old legendary lore, and the tales bound up with old houses and places, so was by no means unwilling to join Gretchen in following in the steps of Lady Mackenzie, as she toiled up the ill-paved mule path, which lead to Saint Eustorgio's cross, and let herself be supported by the tall uhlan's arm.

The distance to be traversed was not many hundred yards, but steep; and all were glad to rest, when they got to the top, where there stood side by side a small wayside shrine, adorned with a halfobliterated fresco of the Madonna, with a face of sorrow; and a large stone cross, plain, but for the rude carving traced on it by the hand of time, which, while destroying the correctness of its outline, had added much to its picturesqueness. Such a sight was common enough in those parts, yet one to be passed by unnoticed, or regarded with reverential tenderness, as being hallowed by many prayers and tears, according to the disposition of the person who gazed on it.

Amongst the little company now approaching it, there were those of both classes of mind. Lady Mackenzie, with her love for the Italian people, cared for whatever was bound up with their national life, though she was personally in favour of more austere forms of religion, and preferred silence and space to ceremonials, however pregnant with meaning, and outward aids to worship of any kind.

Blanche's heart went out chiefly to the individuals, who poured out their sorrows at these wayside halting-places.

On the occasion of divers sojourns in Italy, she had not unfrequently seen a male or female figure, more often the

latter, kneeling in absorbed devotion before such shrines and crosses, and wondered what the particular burden might be, which brought them thither. For a like reason, she felt eager to hear the story of the unknown Assunta, whose life seemed so intimately bound up with the spot they were then visiting, as to make the legend connecting its name with the saintly Eustorgio, fade into comparative insignificance in the minds of the people of the neighbourhood.

Gretchen did not take this point of view at all. To her all the shrines and flowers, the incense and banners, the chanting and ritual of the Roman Catholic

Church, were utter childishness, not worthy of a sensible person's consideration; and her husband went still further. If he believed in a personal evil spirit, it took the shape of a Jesuit; and against anything connected with the church, which acknowledges the Pope as head, he protested, as an attempt to drag German enlightenment back to Canossa.

All the same, these feelings were kept under with military strictness, and the count was quite ready to strike his heels together and make a most profound bow, when Signor Canobbio, who had preceded them up the hill, presented a brownly-clad monk, leaning on a staff by the cross, as Padre Francesco, his parish priest.

This monk was, in his way, as true a type of a certain unworldly class of ecclesiastics reared by Rome, as Monsignor Marley, who figured in the earlier pages of this story, was a representative of sons of that Church wholly, different in nature.

There are some who, from the bias of their minds, believe the papal system only produces the first, whilst others, equally prejudiced, aver the astuteness and craftiness of the second are to be found in all its children. Those who judge righteous judgment must acknowledge, that it has possessed both kinds in all ages.

Padre Francesco had taken the threefold

vow in early manhood, and kept it strictly, rigorously maintaining a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Of pleasures he knew none, save such as come to a man in the unremitting devotion of his whole being to others. He had never permitted himself to cherish any private wish or ambition. To his order he had vowed obedience, and that obedience he heartily and unhesitatingly gave. Sent to minister as their parish priest to the people of Sant' Eustorgio di Treva, he had for three years given them of his best, alike in publication and private, whether they needed help for the body or mind. Rejoicing with them in glad hours, weeping with them in sad ones, serving them humbly and faithfully

at all times, he had entirely won their hearts, so that they expressed their determination not to let him go from them. Nevertheless, at the call of his superiors, he meekly returned to lead the monastic life among the brethren of his order, saying resolutely, though with not wholly concealable tears, to the people he had loved so well,—

'I have but to obey.'

The hot-headed, quick-feeling inhabitants of the paese clamoured and became uproarious. Their beloved Padre Francesco must be given back to them. They would have no other parish priest, for no other could guide them so faithfully, sympathise with them so fully, be such a

comfort to them on their death-beds. It was a hard parting on both sides. But it had to be, and the good father counselled patience. However, this was advice which his peasant congregation was not so ready to take from him, as such other as he had from time to time given them. Their importunity gained the day. After a while he was restored to them.

And now, yet a few words of the man himself. The expression of his face was one rather of gentle benevolence than power; his were not the flashing eyes of a Padre Cristoforo, whose countenance told of hard battles with, and bold conquest of, self. One rather saw in this worn monk, tokens of a mind at rest, of a life going VOL. III.

forth in love to its fellows, of a man who had learnt, that religion and love were synonymous. Let no one suppose his was a weak face, though few, who have read the brief foregoing sketch carefully, are likely to fall into that error. No, he had the massive jaw and firmness of mouth, which tell of great strength of purpose; but these features were almost, entirely, concealed by a flowing beard.

He was of humble origin, the child of devout parents, who never thought of doubting the teaching of the Church in which their fathers and forefathers had been reared; and their son followed in their steps. He hardly realised, that there could be persons who professed another

form of Christianity; no such had come in his way, consequently, there had been nothing to kindle in him a zeal for proselytising; and if a bigot, he was one unconsciously. All the legends and observances of his faith were to him matters on which there could be but one opinion; but he never launched into argument about them, taking for granted that everyone was of the same opinion as himself. Simple as a child in his beliefs and in his trust, with him to hear had been to do, and his life was of a holy beauty, such as many a man, who would be ready to cry 'nicht nach Canossa' with Count Halm-Halm, is very far from realising.

Padre Francesco had also valuable social

qualities. Though plain in his habits, he was no over-rigid ascetic, when Holy Church did not call on him to fast; and at social gatherings of his flock a seat was always ready for him. A ready answer, a good jest, would often come from his lips at such times, and he was equally good at telling a merry anecdote, or touching story.

Such was the man whom Guiseppe Canobbio introduced to Lady Mackenzie and her guests, and in doing so, he added,—

'The good father has kindly promised to tell you the story of Assunta, the end of which fell in his own young days. He will do this far better than I could, who only learnt it at second hand.'

The monk smiled.

'My friend Guiseppe speaks too well of my powers,' he said; 'still, if the *signori* are willing to listen, I will do my best. Only, as the story is a long one, I pray you everyone to be seated. There is room for all at the foot of the cross,' he added, with meaning, as he pointed to some steps, which often served passers-by as a resting-place.

His suggestion was readily accepted, and in a moment he had a group of listeners seated, waiting for him to begin.

'May I be permitted, as an old man, to seat myself?' he asked; then taking the answer for granted, found a place for himself on the top of the low wall which divided an olive garden from the road, and forthwith began his tale.



CHAPTER VII.

THE STORY OF ASSUNTA.

WILL not attempt to give the story, which the good monk told, in his own words; but only

record faithfully what Blanche Stapeleton noted down of it afterwards. It ran as follows:—

Very many years ago, one April evening, some one was kneeling at the foot of the cross of Sant' Eustorgio. The air was balmy; a light breeze caused the fleecy white clouds to chase each other

in swift succession across the deep blue sky, forming a ceaseless chain of fantastic imagery; there was a pleasant ripple on the sea; the olive trees gently bent their heads, and seemed to whisper to each other that life was a pleasant thing. Around was silence but for the sound of the angelus-bell, calling the simple folks of the country to cease from toil, and wash their souls by prayer from earthly stains, ere seeking their well-earned rest. In short, all nature spoke of peace. Yet the clasped hands, the mournful look in the dark eyes uplifted towards the symbol of redemption, the whole attitude of the lonely figure kneeling before the cross, told of some great anguish, of a human

being wrestling in supplication with its Creator.

The figure was that of a young girl, poorly clad, but very beautiful; a true Italian beauty, with massive tresses, large brown eyes capable of an infinite variety of expression, teeth white and even, and regular features. In those days Assunta Fubertini was held to be the handsomest girl for many a mile round. as she was also one of the poorest. Her father was a fisherman, and lived in the most tumble-down of all the queer dwellings which went to make up the borgo de' pescatori. He was a hard man, and a bad one. Life had been no bed of roses for him; he had known many failures, and

charitable people said that had made him rough. Let us hope it was so; anyhow, his wife and daughter had reason to know that something had made him thus, and it caused them much trouble. His wife gave him as good as she got, and was as hard-fisted, loud-voiced a virago as could well be found; her shrill tones always being heard above all others in any quarrel amongst the fishwomen on market days.

But Assunta was gentle and honest and loving, ready to make excuses for everyone's failings but her own, even for the uncalled-for harshness with which her father often treated her, and for the unreasonable demands her mother made upon her strength. She was up every

day before dawn, and toiled early and late at home and in their olive garden, which lay in the direction of Sant' Eustorgio's cross, and at mending her father's nets, besides giving all spare moments to lacemaking. By this last occupation, she meant some day to gain her livelihood, for Assunta had her ambitions, and did not mean to dress Saint Catherine's locks and live and die a drudge in a loveless home, though she could wait patiently for better times. She had dreams of a house of her own, where, though all might be of the plainest, love should flavour every dish, and a stalwart, darkeyed fisherman would be ready to: shield his little wife from every danger.

Nor was this a mere fancy picture, when she thought of this husband, who was to be so good to her, and to whom she would be so faithful, there rose before her mind the face dearest to her in all the world, though for three years. she had not seen it—this was the face of her own true love, Gennaro Ercole, the finest looking man and the best conducted in the place. People had said, when they saw them together, that they were a well-matched pair, both so handsome and bearing such an excellent character; and as no other match had hitherto suggested itself for Assunta, her father, though unwilling on account of Gennaro's small means, had not refused

his consent to their betrothal, but had made the condition, that they should not be married till the young man had put by a certain sum. Gennaro was hard-working, yet had never been able to save much, being the only son of a poor widow, who lived at a village up in the hills above Sant' Eustorgio di Treva; and there was little opening for him as a fisherman, though he tried it for a while, to keep near his old mother. After a time, however, beginning to see, that years might pass ere he could put by the sum mentioned by Michele Fubertini, if he remained at Sant' Eustorgio, he had made up his mind to go to Genoa or Leghorn and seek his fortune. The parting was painful, yet both his

mother and Assunta acknowledged, amid tears, that it was needful; and one day he had made up his bundle, and bid farewell to his betrothed, promising, if alive, to be back in three years to claim her.

For a while after his departure, things had gone on much as usual, only that she missed his smiles and loving words of comfort when they had met on the strand, or under the shade of the olive trees, after she had, perhaps, had a specially hard time at home.

Then a day came, when she shed many tears, and thought she could never be happy again. It was because her father had come home with his brain none the clearer for the amount of wine he had been drinking, and told her, with a leer, she was a good girl and a beauty. Had he not always said so, and been an indulgent father? Yes, of course. And now, she was to have a rich husband, who would buy her fine dresses and trinkets, so that she might look down on everyone else in the place.

Somehow Assunta had felt more frightened at this unwonted show of affection than she ever had at any of her father's brutality; and her instincts had not misled her, as was only too soon proved.

The meaning of his caresses was, that he had promised her as a wife to Giovanni Battista Novaro, the richest, most illfavoured, and worst man in Sant' Eustorgio.

Giovanni Battista was owner of an olive-mill, and possessed a great deal of land, as well as money in the funds. Rumour said his father had made a fortune by smuggling; certainly, whether the riches were ill-gotten or not, no blessing seemed to rest on them, and they did not help Giovanni Battista to gain either love or respect. The better men shunned him, no honest girl would have a word to say to him, and with reason, if but half that was said of him was true. Two accusations against him could be proved beyond doubt, namely, that he sought his companions amongst the roughest inhabitants of the borgo de' pescatori, and that he could often be

seen reeling home on Sundays and festas

—a rare sight in temperate Italy.

Such was the man to whom Michele Eubertini had promised his daughter. Of course he salved his conscience with the excuse used by other wretches equally ignoble, though perhaps far above him in worldly station. He was crippled by debts; and Giovanni Battista promised to put all straight for him, and talked grandly of future favours. It was not, that this hateful wooer was in love with Assunta; her gentleness and modesty were not half so fascinating for him as the bold, saucy ways of the sisters of some of his boon companions; but he was wroth at people saying scornfully that all his gold could not buy him a wife, and, therefore, made up his mind to have the acknowledged beauty of the parish. Tears and entreaties on Assunta's part were unavailing. Her father turned a deaf ear to all her pleadings. Then, at last, she said,—

'They may drag me to the altar if they choose, but not one step will I go of my own free will. I am Gennaro's betrothed, and will be true to him. He promised to be back in three years, and I know he will come.'

This speech had been made neither violently nor tearfully, but with a quiet determination which meant resistance to the last; and it had gone some way VOL. III.

towards impressing her parents, seeming at least to awaken some sense of duty in her mother.

'Let us wait a bit,' the old woman had said to Michele. 'After all, Gennaro is the girl's promised husband; and in two months the three years will be over. If he does not come then, Assunta cannot complain, if we make her take Giovanni Battista, and I will see, that she does.'

Tired of scenes and useless battles, Michele gave in, and with the more readiness that his wife assured him secretly she felt convinced, Gennaro must be drowned, or they would have heard of him long before. Assunta was left unmolested till the two months were well

nigh at an end, and then was told to be ready to celebrate her betrothal with Giovanni Battista Novaro on the eve of the festival of Sant' Eustorgio.

It was this trouble, which had brought her to kneel in anguish at the foot of the old stone cross beside the shrine of Our Mother of Consolations, where tradition said no sorrow had ever been poured out in vain, and wondrous miracles of healing had been wrought.

Only three days were wanting to the dreaded eve, and then what would happen to her?

She had been hard at work all the afternoon weeding thes trip of land belonging to her father; and ere going home

to scowls and cutting remarks about her not smiling and looking as bright as was to be expected of a girl about to meet with such good fortune, had stopped a few moments to pray quietly, knowing few people would pass at that hour. Her hoe was laid down beside her, and her hands bore traces of toil, so that when she raised them to her face, which was wet with tears, they left their earthy impress on it.

Poor Assunta! at first she had given way to convulsive sobs, which shook her whole frame; but gradually the stillness all around her, her own strength of character, and the soothing effect of prayer had calmed her, and she knelt on, forgetful of the fleeting time, of the angry reception at home, of getting supper ready, and poured out her sore heart in asking blessings on her dear one, and endurance for herself.

'May the Lord God and the Blessed Mary keep him safe,' she murmured, 'by land and sea. May the holy angels watch over my Gennaro, my beloved. . . .'

The sun was sinking to rest; glorious shades of crimson and purple decked the sky beyond the foreland, where stood the ancestral *palazzo* of the marquesses of Speranza; soon, in that country of no twilight, night would fall,—and still she lingered, heedless of these warnings to

turn homeward; equally unmindful of a brisk step coming along the road, till the shadow of a man was cast beside the shade of the cross. Then at length she looked up. A tall sailor stood close to her, reverentially uncovering his head at sight of the holy sign, and bearing a bundle slung by a stick over his shoulder. In another instant stick and bundle were flung aside, and the sailor had raised her up in his strong arms, and was drawing her to his heart.

- 'Assunta, my beloved!'
- 'Gennaro, my heart's life!'

For a few moments the joy of being re-united was enough for both. They could not speak. Then Gennaro, looking down fondly on the girl for whose sake he had been a wanderer, asked,—

- 'What ails thee, my little one? Thou art grown thin and pale.'
 - 'I was waiting for thee,' she whispered.
- 'For me, my Assunta? Didst thou think I had forsaken thee? Hadst thou lost thy faith in me?'
- 'Lost faith in thee, Gennaro? Nay, thou art joking. But it is an ugly joke.' The red lips pouted, making the sailor stoop to kiss them, till they smiled again. 'But the sea is wide and deep, and I had no news of thee—and, and—things were not right at home.' This with a little sob.
- 'Ah, I understand. It was all this brought thee here this evening.'

'Yes, I came to pray for thee and me.'

'Thou didst well, my little one, to come for help to Our Lady of Consolation. But now, what is the great trouble at home?'

'Father said, thou wouldst not come back, and bade me take Giovanni Battista Novaro for a husband; with much fighting, I got him to say he would not insist on our betrothal till Sant' Eustorgio's Eve; then he would wait no longer, so he said. Oh, Gennaro, I know not what to do.'

Gennaro's eyes had flashed at the mention of Giovanni Battista; he knew well what manner of man the rich millowner was, and felt the insult to his darling deeply. However, this was his hour of triumph. He could afford to be generous.

'Dry thy tears,' he said, tenderly.
'There shall be a betrothal on Sant'
Eustorgio's Eve; but it shall be the
public renewal of thine and mine. I
have seen many countries and been
fortunate. I was able to do a little
business on my own account, though
I worked my passage as a sailor. My
savings are far beyond the sum thy father
named. Come, my Assunta, be merry.
We will buy a bit of land; and thou
shalt have the finest kerchiefs and earrings, which I have brought over the
sea for thee. Yes, we can snap our

fingers at Giovanni Battista and all his gold. Only, tell no one thou hast seen me. For, first I must up to the hills to see the dear old mother; the widow's eyes will be none the worse for a sight of her only son. Tell me when and where was the betrothal to be?'

'At the Corona d'Oro, at seven in the evening.'

'Good. I shall be there too, though not as a witness to Giovanni Battista's betrothal. Couldst thou manage to meet me here at the ringing of the angelus?'

'It will not be easy. I shall be watched. But I will, Gennaro.'

'Well said. Till then, keep my secret.

Now, I must start over the mountains to Mortarino. It is getting late; I must not tarry. I shall take the short cut across the high rocks above Ramo.'

- 'Thou wilt not lose thy way, Gennaro?'
- 'Foolish question. Have I not known every step of the country from a boy?'
- 'True, still be careful, for my sake, Gennaro. It looks as if there might be a storm. The sky is suddenly beginning to look threatening.'
- 'Of course, I will take care. Dost thou think I have travelled so far to come back and risk my neck needlessly at home? No; so fret not. Expect me here when the angelus-bell rings on

Sant' Eustorgio's Eve, and till then may all good spirits guard thee.'

He kissed her tenderly, stooped to gather up his stick and bundle, and in another moment was marching off gaily, whistling as he went.

At the turn of the road he stopped and glanced back for an instant. Assunta was standing with clasped hands gazing after him, as if she could yet hardly realise that all was not a dream. Then, as he became lost to sight, she shouldered her hoe and ran off, swiftly, towards the borgo de' pescatori.

Saturday was always market-day; but as it would also be the eve of the great

festival of the patron saint, that week market was to be on Friday. On the Saturday the *piazza* would be required for preparations for the morrow; banners and garlands, and decorations of all kinds having to be made ready.

When Assunta had reached home, after her interview with Gennaro, she was, of course, well scolded. The polenta was overdone; her father was waiting for his supper, and, but that he was afraid the effects of ill-treatment would make his daughter look less beautiful in Giovanni Battista's eyes, might have shown his displeasure by rougher means than words. Fortunately Assunta was too full of joy to heed any grumbling much; she felt

as if she were walking on air, and looked so bright, that her mother said to old Michele,—

'I declare the money is gilding the pill to our girl. You see how right I was to make you give her time.'

And Michele had grunted an assent.

On the Friday, as has been said, there was market. It was always an animated sight. The women wore gay handkerchiefs, and many displaying their fruit and vegetables, were young and handsome, and formed a good contrast, in their lighter dresses, to the bronzed, red-capped fishermen, who brought the produce of their nets. Groups of people tood laughing and chattering in one cor-

ner, old women haggled in another. Some girls showed off their lace to the dealers, who often came on market days to see what bargains they could make. Two toothless old crones, the greatest gossips in the place, were chattering together.

'Hah, there goes Assunta Fubertini,' said one to the other; 'see how proud she looks. How she lifts her head, and prances along, as if we were none of us good enough for her, that is all because of being about to be betrothed to a rich man.'

'It must be,' said her hearer. 'Yet,
I thought she cared for Gennaro Ercole.'
'Once it was thought so. Only he, no

doubt, was long ago drowned at sea. Quite as well for him, poor fellow! I pity him, if he came back to see her Giovanni Battista's wife.'

'So do I. No daughter of mine should have him, if he had been as rich as a Jew, and had as fine a palace as the Holy Father at Rome.'

'Quite right; quite right. Money turns girls' heads, you see. At first, folks said, Assunta held out, though her father beat her black and blue, and locked her up for a week on bread and water, and very little of that. But, I suppose, Giovanni Battista's riches made her change her mind. Last evening she was talking to a man by the shrine of Our Lady of Consolation. Our

Enrico saw them together, from the top of the hill, where he had been for fir-cones. It must have been Giovanni Battista.'

'It must—it must,' and the two charitable, truth-loving souls shook their heads ruefully.

What matter, that Gennaro was tall and straight, and Giovanni Battista short and high-shouldered almost to deformity? What matter, that at the very time Assunta must have been talking to Gennaro, Giovanni was smoking his pipe on the piazza, and that one of the speakers, whose window overlooked the square, could have known this, had she cared to refreshen her memory. It was so nice, to have a bit of VOL. III.

scandal to retail, useful too, for it brought possible purchasers to her stall.

There was a movement in the crowd; a procession was coming down the steps of the church. A priest was carrying the viaticum to a dying man. In front walked acolytes, bearing a cross and waving censers.

The more devout amongst the spectators knelt, the men uncovered their heads.

- 'What has happened?' asked some one, as the procession moved on towards the hospital.
- 'There has been an accident,' came in reply. 'A sailor was found, early this morning, terribly injured, beneath the Ramo rocks. There is no hope. His wounds are mortal, and he has been carried to the hospital.

- 'What was his name?' inquired a lacedealer.
- 'Gennaro Ercole, a native of these parts, returned suddenly after a long absence.'

A scream was heard in the crowd.

The cry was raised, that some one had fainted.

- 'Who can it be?'
- 'It is Assunta Fubertini. Ah! poor girl, he was her betrothed.'

Borne by two fishermen, Assunta was brought home still unconscious and laid on her bed, which she did not leave for weeks.

Sant' Eustorgio's Eve came and went without a betrothal either for Giovanni Battista or Gennaro, and the latter's body was laid to rest in the little Treva cemetery beneath a giant cypress tree, watered by the tears of his broken-hearted mother.

After that, many a Sant' Eustorgio's Eve came and went; yet neither then nor at any other time was Assunta Fubertini betrothed to Giovanni Battista Novaro. After remaining for weeks on the verge of the grave, she recovered, though as one who awakes from a dream, of which the effects cannot be wholly shaken off. She often talked of Gennaro, and said he was to meet her on Sant' Eustorgio's Eve by the old wayside cross; then they were to be betrothed. If anyone laughed or seemed to doubt it, she would smile gently and say,—

'Oh, but he is coming, my Gennaro. He promised and is faithful.'

Her parents were kinder to her after this trouble, and let her do what work she liked at home, without driving her to slave away as formerly. They said no more about Giovanni Battista; indeed, the latter would not have had her. He did not want a half-witted or sickly wife, he brutally said. The good feelings of the people made them angry with him for that, and after a while he left the neighbour hood, and died in a drunken quarrel at Leghorn.

Time went on, Assunta's parents died, and though they had little to leave, it was enough for her wants. She lived a simple life, yet was useful to many. All children loved and ran to meet her. By many a sick-bed, she was a faithful watcher; not a few could tell of how she had nursed and soothed them in illness or trouble. In all matters of daily life, she was sensible enough, and led a life that those might have envied, who shook their heads and

pointed significantly to their forehead, when asked if she were sane.

Only on the eves of all festivals, above all, on that of Sant' Eustorgio, she would dress in her best and go to kneel before the wayside cross. If asked the reason why, she answered,—

'To meet Gennaro.'

Few traces of her early beauty remained; she grew quickly old and thin, and leant on a staff to support herself, so that people learned soon to call her old Assunta.

One April evening, it was again the eve of the patron saint's festival, the aged woman had gone as usual to pray before the cross, guiding her faltering steps there, with difficulty. It was an evening much like that when she had met Gennaro, calm and peaceful, if anything a trifle warmer.

Some horse chestnut trees had been planted above the shrine and cross; and the breeze caused the blossoms to fall to the ground like snow-flakes.

Whilst Assunta knelt in absorbed devotion before the cross, people passed from time to time, and heard her praying. They knew her ways, and would not disturb her.

'Re-unite us,' she murmured. 'Yea, thou wilt; for thou art faithful, and Gennaro is faithful. . . . Oh, what glory. It is the paradise of God. . . . I see the holy angels . . . and oh . . . I see Gennaro!'

Night came on, and Assunta still remained before the cross.

The morning of the festival dawned; two monks from a neighbouring monastery passed by, on their way to early mass at the parish church, and beheld the body of an aged woman stretched out before Sant' Eustorgio's cross, covered with the white petals of the horse chestnut blossom, as with a mantle of pitying snow-flakes.

'Let us raise her up, my son,' said the older monk.

Brother Francesco obeyed.

- 'Merciful heaven!' he exclaimed. 'It is Assunta Fubertini. She is quite dead, quite cold.'
- 'Not dead, my son, only beginning to live. The earthly trial is over, the heavenly life is dawning. She kept her tryst in trusting faith, and has entered into her well-earned rest.'

Such was the story told by Padre

Francesco, the closing act of which, he himself had witnessed, and whereof the pathos had sunk deeply into the hearts of the sympathetic country people of the neighbourhood. The little audience of strangers, to whom the old monk told it, also felt its beauty; but Blanche above all was touched by it, and experienced a thrill of gladness at this simple record of a faithful life, steadfast unto death.

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CHAPTER VIII.

OLD FRIENDS AGAIN.

N the winter following the time when we paid our last visit to Denesbury, Herbert Marley's mind was much occupied with his oratorio. In the autumn, he had come back from Germany with fresh ideas, and feeling an increase in his creative powers. He had heard much good music, and conversed with some of the leading musicians of the Fatherland. At the same time he had become neither a convert to Wagner's

theories, nor a wholesale condemner thereof; whilst far from going all lengths with
the new master, he acknowledged that a
great truth underlay the idea of the union
of music and drama; a shadow, so it
seemed to him, of the far deeper truth of
the harmony, which those with listening
ears acknowledge pervades the drama of
life, though the key be often minor, and the
final chord may have to be sought in the
ages to come. And now, back in Denesbury, and with the comparative leisure,
which some of the winter months brought,
he wished to complete his own great
work.

In future years, he might not have nearly so much time to give to composition. A plan was being started amongst ardent lovers of music for the foundation of a college, somewhat on the plan of a German conservatoire, for the purpose or giving an impetus to the musical education of the people, and affording opportunities for those really gifted in the way of execution or composition to develop their powers. Herbert took a deep interest in this scheme, and it was thought probable that he would be offered the directorship of the college, a post of importance and high emoluments, as well as one, he was well suited to fill.

One special matter, he had for some time been carefully considering in connection with his oratorios, it was to find a person to prepare, arrange, and, where necessary, compose the texts for it in accordance with his ideas. The subject was to be the trials and triumph of the

three children passing through the fire, treated historically, but with interludes of a more allegorical or visionary character, bringing out the teaching of their story. To find some one of high capabilities, yet possessing the humility, which would be willing to efface self and all personal conceptions for the sake of the more perfect blending of music and subject, was not easy; and in despair of this, Herbert called one afternoon at the Saint Cross parsonage to consult Doctor Mackenzie about it. They had been little together of late, for the doctor was deeply engaged in literary labours, as well as with the needs of his parish. Besides, he found it necessary to be very careful to guard against cold, so that the brisk walks on Denesbury heath, once the source of so

much enjoyment to him, had been entirely given up.

The doctor was in his study, and there Herbert went to find him. It was a large, low room, with shelves, on which stood ponderous volumes, and some rare old vellum - bound editions, almost entirely hiding its walls from floor to ceiling. 'Musty old books,' some of those admitted to this sanctum termed them. 'Some of my dearest friends,' so Christopher Mackenzie called them. Over the centre of the floor, the edges of which were stained a rich brown, was stretched a thick Turkey carpet, pleasant to the tread. Furniture, there was little, a few old oak settees, a heavy-carved chest to match, with massive iron locks, and the doctor's writing-table; that was all. Ornaments there were none,

save that above the mantelpiece, likewise of oak, there hung some curiously-wrought weapons, which had long been in the possession of the Mackenzie family, and that some Christmas roses bloomed on the writing-table in a vase of Venetian workmanship.

'Flowers are my weakness or my strength; I hardly know which to call them,' the owner of the study had been heard to say; 'and I always allow myself the luxury of a few to glance at, when I work; be the season what it may. They aid me in realising fair summer beauty, and something even beyond that, even on the dreariest day. They help also to drive any gatherings of fog out of one's heart. But it is only just a few that I like to have. I do not like to see them

gathered heedlessly, in great quantities; for after all they are nowhere so in place, as where they sprang up at the Creator's will; and the green grass and rocks of the earth are the best setting for such gems.'

When Herbert entered the study, he found his friend employed in writing, and at the first glance thought him not looking so strong as formerly, a little thinner, a little less erect. Yet, if not so well in bodily health, his countenance had if anything gained in spirituality, and the eyes shone with a power no physical force can give. The loveliness of the man's soul transfigured him more and more.

Herbert made some apology for disturbing him; but the doctor rose and stretched out his hand with that glad smile of welcome, which those who came in contact with him, knew and loved so well.

- 'There is no need to apologise,' he said,
 'I am only too glad of an excuse to stop
 working for a moment, without conscience
 saying, I am idle. How are you, and how
 is Mrs Marley?'
- 'Mother is well, thank you; and so am I, but sorely puzzled, and so I come to you to get me out of the dilemma.'
- 'That is not always an easy matter, my dear fellow; getting into one is another thing.'
- 'I know, and that is what made me venture to trouble you.'
- 'No trouble, if only I can be of use. Come, be seated, and let me hear what it is.'

Perhaps some may think this conversavol. III. tion hardly worth recording; but I give it as an example of Christopher Mackenzie's unvaried courtesy, which never seemed to fail him, however great a stress of work he laboured under, or however inopportunely an interruption came; and this was no surface politeness, no self-restraining for worldly ends, or the sake of influence or popularity; had it been so, I think it must sometimes have failed him. It was heart courtesy, which saw in every human being a neighbour sent by God, to be ministered unto.

Herbert explained, how puzzled he felt concerning the words of his oratorio, and gave the reason.

'I really don't know,' he wound up by saying, 'to whom to go. There is Dobson; I might try him, yet doubt his

capabilities. I cannot think of anyone excepting Henry Platagenet, and I don't think he would be the right man.'

'No, he will not do,' the doctor replied; 'you know his family motto, Marley, "Rulers, we." And he acts up to it. He is very good, where he has all his own way; but cannot be so emptied of self, as to go well in double harness.'

'Quite true. Then what am I to do?'

Doctor Mackenzie leant back in his chair, and rested his chin meditatively on the thumb and forefinger of his left hand. 'H'm, I hardly know,' he said; then after a pause: 'I have it. Try Atkinson.'

Herbert looked up surprised.

'Atkinson? Would he do?'

'Why not? He is highly gifted; a poet; has gone through a good course of

training, and would give of his very best for you. Yes; he is the very man for the work, now I come to think of it; and it would be an excellent thing for him.'

'Wouldn't people say we made a strange pair of co-workers at an oratorio? He, who so nearly went utterly to the dogs, and I, who not so long ago was—well, a pessimist?'

'The Pharisees might, perhaps; but optimists, of the best sort, would not. I mean those, who "believe all things, hope all things." And what matter the Pharisees? They are but poor creatures, in spite of their would-be righteousness. What do people think? What will the world say? How much noble work has been left undone, because of those questions, Marley? Yet there is no answer

to them, but, "Act according to your conscience; and live down adverse verdicts."

'Well, is it right?'

'Ah, my dear fellow, that is a question for you to answer yourself. A good work, unless you approach it with unclean hands, is undoubtedly right. Error that is past and repented, ought not to be a bar to future usefulness; and, if you want a further answer to seal the lips of scorners, does there not reach you a Voice of Power sounding through the ages, saying,—"Let him that is without sin, cast the first stone"? For myself, I wish you God speed, believing the work will be a strengthening and comfort both to yourself and Josiah, and also to those who hear it when produced.'

So the affair was settled, and the offer

making him come to the Victoria Hall, that he might hear how portions sounded on the organ.

The following autumn, if all went well, the oratorio was to be brought out at Denesbury, and, later on, in London. Meanwhile, the composer looked round to see what singers would best fill the leading parts; and that being settled, numerous rehearsals were to follow for the choruses and orchestra.

When the time for taking a short summer holiday came, the Mackenzies and Josiah, who felt he might allow himself the treat, started for the lakes; and the Marleys revisited Germany; all, ere parting, expressing the hope to meet again at Denesbury in September, and looking forward with delight to the first production

the Saint Cross parsonage or the new home, Herbert had made for his mother in one of the pleasantest squares in Denesbury.

Mrs Mackenzie never left the house before May or June; but knew the art of making her drawing-room a charming centre for friendly meetings; and Mrs Marley, though she seldom went out otherwise, was often to be found there, looking still handsome and stately, though somewhat aged, and unbending to her son's friends as she had never done to the squire's in the old days at the Priory.

Josiah worked hard at carrying out Herbert's ideas, and they often met and discussed the oratorio, Josiah playing over snatches on his violin, that he might enter the more into their spirit and Herbert sick, as well as the doctors and clergy, found plenty of occupation ready for them, and worked manfully.

The dean showed a vigour none had expected of him; a devoted band of ritualists turned their clergy-house into feverwards; the evangelicals were willing to join with their brethren, forgetful of theological differences; in short, all made common cause against the foe. Doctor Mackenzie was an active member of committees for the organisation of relief, urging on here, advising there, helping everywhere; besides seeming always ready to respond to calls for his personal ministrations, though the parsonage-bell was rung at all hours of the day and night, to summon him to the sick or dying.

He tried to keep the Marleys and Josiah

from returning to Denesbury for a while; but in vain. They said they might be useful, and came back to do their best. All three knew something of his parishioners; Herbert from being organist and choirmaster, Josiah and Mrs Marley from personal visiting; and though the Saint Cross parish was by no means one of the largest, yet, being among the poorest, because containing many clerks and workers in warehouses,-in short, single people without homes,—those who fell sick there, were greatly in need of help. And it fell to the lot of many in that district to be called to lie down patiently and die, thankful, under God, to Christopher Mackenzie for the hope that was in them; whilst many a selfsacrificing deed done alike by those who fell ill, and those who escaped, told that

the 'big parson' had not laboured in vain amongst them.

When the doctor found how useful and devoted his three new coadjutors were, he felt it was well that they had returned to engage in the great labour of love.

By the end of September, there were fewer cases; and after the middle of October were no fresh ones; but, those who had toiled through the troublous time were well-nigh worn out. Let it suffice to speak of the individuals with whom we are immediately concerned.

Mrs Marley was the only one of them, who seemed to have stood the trial without suffering in health—she had done her share bravely, and had shown a tenderness towards such individual sufferers as she came in contact with, which surprised

every one; but not being able to go about much, she gave herself up chiefly to committee work, such as keeping accounts and recording cases, so that the trial was not so great for her.

Her son and Josiah, on the other hand, had devoted themselves to house-to-house visiting, and reporting to the committees. This was often very severe work; for they frequently witnessed scenes of terrible suffering. Herbert, as well as Doctor Mackenzie, though escaping the fever, looked terribly thin and worn.

Josiah was stricken down, and it went hard with him, as was to be expected of one of his delicate constitution. For many days and nights, Herbert, who only left him to snatch a few hours' necessary sleep, thought all hope had fled, and listened with sorrow to his ravings and wanderings, and lamentations about his former wildness, and the harshness of his father. At length, however, the young poet rose from his bed, looking, frail though he had always been, like the ghost of his former self, yet more lovingly devoted than ever to Doctor Mackenzie and Herbert for the wondrous kindness they had showed him.

So there was much to be thankful for, and Denesbury began to resume its usual degree of healthiness, and noted a reassuring decrease in its death-rate. Notwith-standing, there was still much to be done. Many families were bereft of their breadwinners; many persons, usually self-supporting, lacked strength to earn their livelihood, all of which caused serious distress. How to meet this, was a question

difficult enough to provide ample occupation for many wise heads and open hands, and had not men like Mr Westcott set a noble example of liberality, in retrenching their private expenditure, that they might have the more to give, the misery would have known no end.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that December saw Doctor Mackenzie at his post, though sorely in need of change. His wife and friends had strongly urged on him to go away for a while, and he had half promised to do so once arrangements were in some degree made for meeting the hardest weeks of the winter—that is to say, those, when the cold and damp would be most trying, and fuel and provisions would have reached the highest

prices. But he was loth to go. Besides his dislike to leaving Mrs Mackenzie alone—and she never travelled in winter-time, there remained the perplexing question where to go.

'To Rome or Florence,' said one. 'To the Holy Land or the Nile,' suggested another. However, neither proposition seemed exactly to meet his wants.

Cities abounding in artistic and historic interest were quite after his heart, only anything but places of rest for him. With Palestine it would be the same; each step would offer food for thought, each spot would possess its holy associations affording much material for literary labour. And as to the Nile, he had been as far as the pyramids, and wondered at them, and did not care to

repeat the visit, and re-incur so great an expense.

Mrs Marley would have been greatly pleased, if he had decided to go abroad and taken her son as a companion, because she thought it would be very good for Herbert. Yet knowing little of southern climes, she was not ready to propose a plan; and most of the friends, to whom she could think of applying for information, went to Cannes and Rome, if they wanted a change in wintertime, and knew nothing of unfrequented retreats, such as Doctor Mackenzie would have fancied.

The Stapeletons would have been the best people to whom to apply for information. But as the colonel had a great dread of illness in any shape, and was always in VOL. III.

letter-writing was an art, and postage a consideration.

Beyond describing her new home and surroundings, and inquiring after mutual friends, the missive, however, contained little, excepting that Lady Mackenzie had gone on to say a few well-weighed words about Blanche Stapeleton, who was staying with her, and asked what her cousin Christopher thought of Herbert Marley, who had once been betrothed to her niece. She had wound up by declaring with simple straightforwardness, that she felt convinced the breaking off of the engagement had cast a shadow over the life of a very noble woman, and asked if the doctor thought there was any possibility or desirability of its renewal.

Quite contrary to his wont-for this strange man looked on remembering correspondents as a duty not to be lightly set aside—Doctor Mackenzie had put this away amid the stress of extra work, and forgotten it till one afternoon, early in December, when he had retired to his study, and brought out an appallingly large packet of letters in need of replies. When, after briefly considering and answering two or three, he had come to his cousin's, he read it through once carefully, and then a second time. Then he fell to thinking, letting the pen in his right hand lie idly on the table whilst he supported his chin with his left thumb and forefinger.

'Strange,' he said to himself, 'that I should have paid so little heed to Maggie's

letter. I must have been very pre-occupied when reading it. The substance of it had quite escaped my memory. Yet, it seems the very thing we want, in every way.'

Being an open-hearted man, he expressed himself warmly, when he felt warmly; yet knew well the value of words, and was very careful in their use; why, then, did he say to himself, that what his cousin wrote was 'the very thing wanted in every way'?

For the best of reasons; namely, because it was so.

The letter seemed to offer two things; first, it gave the description of a lovely spot, free from tourists, which might afford the temporary rest and change required; and then there seemed hopes

of this leading to an abiding change for Herbert Marley, one such as those who loved him best, had hardly dared to hope for; and yet, which was all they could desire for him.

Doctor Mackenzie himself was far from being without thoughts and wishes for the future of the talented musician, of whom Denesbury had grown so proud, and who was to himself as a son. With his outward circumstances, he was for the present well content; but he could not have known him so well, without being aware that his life lacked a completion fame could never give. Some years before, when he had happened to touch upon the subject of matrimony, and declared that nothing tended so much to develop the virtues of a man as a happy marriage,

and responsibilities shared with a wife; Herbert had told him, in rupt fashion, that such helps never be his, for his religious views parated him from the only won could ever love as a wife, and that was Blanche Stapeleton.

The doctor had heard, of courble Blanche from other sources, and great respect for her. He knew that persons would have advocated a difficultine of action to her own, and arguithat loving devotion would have brough back the wanderer sooner; but he had always felt that she, who had offered up her chances of earthly happiness for conscience' sake, was gloriously noble. Besides, who could tell what teaching those brave years of separation might

have had alike for her and the man she loved.

Being imbued with so deep a respect for what he conceived to be Blanche Stapeleton's character, Doctor Mackenzie was naturally of the opinion that her wishes were entitled to the most respectful consideration: and would have deemed it unworthy alike of her and Herbert, had the latter ventured to approach her again without possessing real proof of the stability of his belief; but, on the other hand, he had always hoped the day might come, when this might be done with all seemliness and good faith. For himself, he could not understand how any persons could love twice as man and woman should love each other; and so as time went on, and Herbert was not attracted by any other woman, he had longed the more that such devotion might receive its crown.

And, in his opinion, the time had at length come for the young man to try his fortunes once again. Though watching Herbert anxiously, and rejoicing much for a long while in the good he saw in him, he had never felt so hopeful about his religious convictions as during the last weeks, when he had met him beside deathbeds, and in the midst of diverse scenes of distress, and seen him minister to those in need of help and comfort with a calmness and power, which could only come of deep faith. And above all, he gladly believed, that Herbert had reaped lasting benefits to himself by becoming a counsellor and friend to Josiah.

The foregoing shows, why he was predisposed to consider his cousin's letter favourably, and of himself we know enough to be sure that strong conviction was likely to be followed by prompt, though not hasty, action. At the same time, I do not feel able, on this particular occasion, to acquit him of being precipitate. In fact, I am not prepared to defend him at all, though ready enough to excuse him, on the ground that his heart ran away with his head, making him allow himself a course of action, which was, to say the least, very risky, and that the very indiscretion makes me care all the more for him. I should not have wished to see him able to be calmly calculating when a way seemed suddenly opened out, which promised happiness for a very dear young friend.

To those who may deem it unworthy of the man, that he, conjointly with a sedate elderly lady, should play the part of deus ex machina, in making up a match, I can but say: It may be inconsistent, yet none the harder to believe for that. Life teaches us that the best and wisest persons do things sometimes, in great emergencies, which are quite contrary to our expectations. We all know it, and shrug our shoulders and call it very human; though that is being rather unfair on humanity. The real reason is, that because we are not yet human enough, we commit these follies. Humanity as it will, and ought to be; how little we realise of that now. Surely it is no mere would-be piety to say we only begin to live, when the years allotted to us on earth are well-nigh run out.

Having frankly acknowledged that Doctor Mackenzie's meditations, in his study, on the December afternoon on which he perused his cousin's letter, were of a somewhat hazardous nature, I will invite you to follow me, and see what they led him to do.

His first act was to rise from his chair, and go, letter in hand, to the drawing-room in search of his wife. He found her in her usual corner of the sofa, with Mrs Marley at her side.

Josiah, who had been brought to the house to be nursed, was reposing in an arm-chair at the opposite end of the room,

whence he could look out, through a diamond-paned oriel window, into the old-fashioned garden of the parsonage, where sundry old yew trees, the pride of a former incumbent, were clipped into grotesque caricatures of divers birds and beasts.

Leaning over the poet's chair stood Herbert Marley, who had looked in for a moment on his way to the Victoria Hall, to discuss a point concerning the words of his oratorio, of which Josiah held sundry manuscript pages on his knee, and which supplied him with interest enough to drive away all the tedium of convalescence.

The room was low, and the ceiling supported by massive cross-beams. Were I beginning my story, and about to tell of much which happened there, it would be worth while attempting its description; but as my tale is drawing to its close, the reader shall not be troubled with a sketch. Suffice it to say, that the furniture was old-fashioned, yet not ugly, and the general aspect cosy. Herbert always compared it to a woman who gave a pleasant impression of being well-dressed, though one could not exactly say what she wore.

Mrs Marley had been telling Mrs Mackenzie she felt sure a change of air and scene would be good for Josiah as well as for her son, as the damp and heavy fogs, by which they had been recently visited, were very bad for his delicate lungs. Certainly he looked very ill, as he sat in the window, raising his large

eyes to inquire the meaning of what Herbert had been saying; and the latter was mentally wondering if it were possible for one so frail to be with them much longer, and had been almost surprised to find how deep an entrance the doctor's foundling, as he sometimes called Josiah in private to his mother, had found into his heart, when the doctor himself came in, and having greeted his friends cordially, drew a chair up to his wife's sofa, and told her he thought he had found a place to go to for a while. He ended by reading out the description which Lady Mackenzie gave of Sant' Eustorgio di Treva, and was listened to with deep interest.

A crimson flush spread over Josiah's hollow cheeks as he heard of palm-trees,

orange-groves, and eternally blue skies. Lady Mackenzie's facile pen sketched her surroundings with a graphic power, well calculated to fire his sympathetic nature.

- 'Would you like to see it all?' Herbert asked, looking down kindly at him, and interpreting his expression.
- 'Oh, so much! Could I but see them, I should die content.'
- 'See them and get well—that would be more to the purpose,' was the ready answer.

Josiah smiled back at the speaker.

'Oh yes, if that could be; only I am so weak. It is not that I am anxious to die. Once I was, but now I have a little work to do, and I have done so little!'

Whilst they talked thus in low tones, the ladies at the other end of the room were expressing their hearty approval of the doctor's suggestions.

'You and Mr Marley ought both to go, and take Josiah,' his wife said. 'Only, do you think you could find habitable quarters in such an out-of-theway place?'

'There is sure to be an inn of some sort,' he replied, 'which would be good enough for us, as Maggie must have stayed there whilst furnishing; but I can write and ask. In short, my dear, there remains but one difficulty, and that is yourself. I don't know that I ever looked at you in the light of one before,' he added, with a humorous glance at Mrs Marley; 'but Scripture and reason

tell me to cleave to my wife, and how can I leave her?'

He drew her hand gently within his arm as he spoke, as if the prospect of separation were indeed a hard one to him. They were usually an undemonstrative pair, yet no one could be long in their presence without perceiving the love which made them all in all to each other, and caused each to be constantly thinking of the other's pleasure. Nowhere was Christopher Mackenzie to be seen to greater advantage than in his own house.

'Oh, I shall do very well,' came from Mrs Mackenzie's lips.

'You need not let it be a difficulty, if I may come and keep house during your absence,' put in Mrs Marley. Then

she called her son to her, and asked, 'Herbert, what do you think of the description of Sant' Eustorgio di Treva? Do you feel inclined to go there for a little while with Doctor Mackenzie?'

'Yes, mother,' he answered, without hesitation. 'It sounds very pleasant, and I think I could manage to take a month's holiday more easily now than later.'

She was somewhat surprised, though greatly pleased, at this reply, having been almost afraid to put the question, because Herbert had several times expressed himself unwilling to leave his work, whenever she had made any allusion to his going away. Not having overheard the conversation, which had just taken place by the window, she could

not of course be aware that he had only changed his mind during the last few minutes, and that only because he wished to please the friend whom he held to be dying, and to take him far away from dear, old, foggy England to a clime where he might spend his remaining days in basking in sunshine, and enjoying the scent of many flowers.

So the doctor's plan having met with such hearty approval, and Josiah's medical adviser having declared that being taken abroad with extreme care might give him a new lease of life, Lady Mackenzie was communicated with further on the subject; and her answer being satisfactory, and her assurances concerning the cleanliness and comfort of the Spada Gloriosa all that could be wished,

nothing remained to be done but to fix the day for starting.

Concerning Blanche, Doctor Mackenzie said not a word to the home party, but the communications about her with his cousin satisfied him. He even kept the secret from his wife till the day before starting for Italy; and considering that he hated having mysteries, it did his firmness great credit.





CHAPTER X.

ON FOREIGN SOIL.

FTER the Halm-Halm's departure, Lady Mackenzie, being left alone with Blanche, had

more leisure to ponder over the revelations made to her by Gretchen, and had at last come to the conclusion to act so far at least in the matter as to try and ascertain her cousin Christopher's opinion on the subject. This resulted in her letter to him, of which the contents have already been mentioned.

She was pleased, when at length answer came, to find that he enterstrong hopes of an attempt to Blanche and Herbert together againg satisfactorily. But when af a second letter came, telling the Marley would be at Sant' Eusthered greatly, and began to fashe said to herself over and of that she wished she had never the matter.

However, what was done be undone; and, when the Thursday came on which th were to arrive, she tried her a woman of spirit, to be cou

All the same, she felt re Blanche—whom she had sim she was ordering rooms at the *Spada* Gloriosa for her cousin, Doctor Mackenzie, and two friends—had said she was going out to sketch; and having accompanied her aunt as far as the inn to await the new arrivals, would proceed on her way alone.

Such rambles of Blanche's often lasted the whole afternoon; so the ominous hour, when she would find out who was one of Doctor Mackenzie's two friends, was put off for a while.

Blanche had taken great interest in the prospect of the doctor's coming to Sant' Eustorgio, having heard much about him from her mother, and had arranged the flowers at the Palazzo Speranza with special care that morning, because she wished him to be pleased with his cousin's new home, wholly unconscious that she would yet far more gladly decorate for one of the friends whom he brought with him.

The day was worthy of the reputation given by Lady Mackenzie to Sant' Eustorgio. One needed to look at the calendar to remind one's-self that it was December. During the earlier part of the morning, a wandering show had stopped in front of the Palazzo, and its inmates had stood out in the grounds without hats or wraps to feed the poor, half-starved dogs and monkeys, even as they might have done in June at home. Indeed, even Lady Mackenzie, though so much accustomed to winter in the south, declared the weather was more like what she was accustomed to in April, and

could not remember ever having experienced such heat at the end of the year.

The sun beat quite fiercely down on aunt and niece as they wended their way down, in the beginning of the afternoon, to the *Spada Gloriosa*; for the path leading there was not sheltered, like that to the *borgo de' pescatori*; and the lined, white sunshades with which sojourners on the Riviera arm themselves, were in continual use.

On reaching the inn, Blanche bade good-bye and started off, with all her sketching paraphernalia, in an eastward direction.

'I don't know exactly when I shall be back,' she called out. 'It depends on the light and my inclination for work.'

The truth was, she was preparing a drawing as a Christmas gift for Lady Mackenzie, and wanted to get on with it as quickly as possible.

Her aunt glanced after her for a moment, with a look of mingled love and pride, then turned to listen to Guiseppe Canobbio, who had a great deal to say for himself, and had already gone several times as far as the bend in the road, shading his eyes with his hand, to look out for the travellers, though it was fully half-an-hour before they were likely to arrive.

'Be assured,' he said, 'we have done our very best to make our honoured guests comfortable; our very best. My wife has scrubbed the tiles of each floor in their rooms herself, till you could see

your face in them; and the mosquitocurtains are white as snow. Also, I have not forgotten to recommend very strongly to Maddalena to put no garlic into the dishes; and she has given me her solemn word not to do so.'

Had it been a question of life and death, Guiseppe could not have looked more in earnest, or shaken his finger more emphatically to give weight, to his statement.

Lady Mackenzie felt relieved, though also considerably amused. The battle about the garlic had been a serious one during her temporary stay at the inn, Maddalena feeling indeed as if the glory of the *Spada* had departed, declaring she had never been called upon before to leave it out, and expressing her con-

viction, with several appeals to her favourite saints, that food could not be wholesome where it was continually absent.

Whilst Guiseppe was talking at the door, his wife, a quiet, elderly woman, with the natural good manners so often found amongst the lower classes in Italy, came out to invite inspection of the rooms above; and Lady Mackenzie followed her upstairs to a suite of fresh, airy rooms, simply furnished, but made sufficiently comfortable by sundry contributions from the palazzo.

'You said one poor gentleman was ill,' said Maria Canobbio: 'so we have done our best all the more willingly.'

'And have succeeded admirably. Everything looks just as I could wish it; and

all these gentlemen are in need of rest, for all have been helping bravely to tend the sick in a time of great distress. Still, as I told you, one only is really ill, and I hope he may soon get better here. This view alone will do him good, I am sure.'

Such was Lady Mackenzie's answer, as she stepped out on to a balcony bright with geraniums and heliotrope, and gazed at the sea and mountains, wondering if those brought up amidst such fair scenes, half knew how beautiful they were

Maria stood respectfully at a distance. There was a great degree of sympathy and unobtrusiveness about her.

Suddenly there was the sound of wheels. Lady Mackenzie roused herself to listen.

'They must be coming,' she said.

'No, not yet. The wheels go too slowly for a travelling carriage. That is a mule-cart carrying stones,' replied Maria. 'Do you know that a strange gentleman is building a house up above the church? It is a fine situation. They say he is an Englishman. You, signora, have made a beginning; and now the strangers will come, and we shall no longer be so poor here.'

Doubtless, what Maria said was true; it was for the good of the many. Still, Lady Mackenzie could not repress an inward sigh, as she felt how, once building began, the primitiveness of Sant' Eustorgio would soon be a thing of the past, and the reign of fashionable shops and high prices begin. For

a short time, the arrival of new-comers might have its advantages, bringing a small circle of pleasant neighbours, and perhaps a chaplain; but that state of things could not last long. It was no good hoping for it; the fate of other towns on the Riviera proved, only too forcibly, the uselessness of doing so.

Again, there was the sound of wheels, and then Maria exclaimed,—

'They come!' and Guiseppe, who continued on the watch below, shouted up the same to the balcony, and Lady Mackenzie went downstairs to await her cousin and his friends.

The loud cracking of a whip was heard, and the driver's 'Hi-up, hi-up,' to his horses. Then a carriage, laden with luggage, and containing three gentlemen, vol. III.

became visible round the corner, the horses trotting along briskly.

In a few moments more, Doctor Mackenzie was greeting his cousin, and Herbert was helping Josiah from his seat.

'Here we are, all safe; and our patient has borne the journey wonderfully,' said the doctor. 'We have been driving all to-day, and the air seems already to have strengthened him. This is a marvellous climate, Maggie, certainly; and it is hard to believe, we have come to spend Christmas with you.'

'Christmas and more than that, I hope, Christopher; and if you must go home, you will have to leave your patient at Palazzo Speranza till he has completed his cure.'

Guiseppe and his wife now came for-

ward to be presented, after which there was much to be seen to during the next hour, such as the arranging of luggage, settling into rooms, and Josiah to be attended to and made to rest. With the latter Herbert occupied himself, whilst the two cousins had plenty of home news to talk over by snatches, whilst likewise making themselves useful.

Lady Mackenzie was much struck by the nobility and dignity of Herbert's bearing and countenance, and hoped and wondered afresh about what was to follow from having brought him to Sant' Eustorgio. When left alone at length with her cousin, she felt very shy about it all, and, be it confessed, he was the same. Both guessed each other's thoughts, and the doctor said,—

'I hope it may be all right, and I think it will,' as if she would fully take in his meaning without more direct allusions or words being needed; and she was thankful to him for being so brief.

Josiah, as Doctor Mackenzie had said, had borne the journey wonderfully, and after he had lain quiet and happy on his bed for nearly an hour, Herbert felt he might safely leave him and go out for a stroll; for he longed for exercise after having been pent up in the carriage for so many hours.

'Are you quite comfortable, old fellow?' he asked.

'Quite; thank you. Oh, Marley, it is all thanks to you. I never thought I should see anything so lovely.'

'Never mind talking about that now.

You must rest well at first, if coming here is to do you the good we hope. Now, should you feel happy, if I went out and smoked a cigarette?'

'Quite. Give me a book and lots of lemonade, and I shall not want you till the evening.'

'Oh! I shall not be away so long; perhaps an hour. I will just go a little way up one of these hills. Here is a book, I picked up at the station in London; it is about these parts, and the descriptions seem rather good. Will it do for you?'

'Quite well. I am very sleepy, so it does not matter much what you give me; only, don't forget to send up the lemonade before you go out.'

Herbert did more than that. He sent

for fresh, spring water, and made a jugful himself before starting, not knowing how Maddalena might set about it in his absence; then only did he take his hat and tell the doctor he was going out for a while, and asked him to keep an eye on Josiah, a request which was readily acceded to by Doctor Mackenzie, who was seated on the little balcony chatting with his cousin.

When Herbert reached the front door, he found Guiseppe ready to open it for him, and coming forward rubbing his hands together, and bowing profoundly, to ask if he could be of any service.

Herbert thanked him, but replied he was only going for a stroll.

'Ah! he was already going to take the air. Yes, it was very healthy, and the neighbourhood very beautiful, though it hardly became a man of the place to praise it. There were also several points of interest. The old well of Sant' Eustorgio, and the cross above it, were excellent points of view, and much admired by the ladies up at the palazzo.'

Guiseppe expressed himself quite ready to act as guide, if required. Herbert, wishing to be alone, put off the good man by hoping to have his society on a future occasion. He was only going to wander about a little just then without any particular object in view; so amid more bows and civilities from Guiseppe, he started off along the road, which skirted round the back of the Speranza territory, and led through the borgo de pescatori.

It was past three o'clock, and no longer hot, a delicious breeze having sprung up, which made walking pleasant.

There was a slight ripple on the sea, which was of a deep blue for some distance out, till it reached a point where a line of foam seemed sharply to divide its waters; and beyond that, it became a bright and lovely green.

Herbert, who had enough of close streets in Denesbury, preferred passing outside the *borgo*, and walking along the strand, where a number of fishermen were busy hauling in their nets, and sundry girls were seated on upturned boats plying their bobbins.

Most of them looked up as he passed, and followed him with their eyes for a while. Strangers were still objects of great curiosity to them. After a while he left the shore, and tried a path which led among the olive-terraces. It was very tempting to linger there. The topmost branches of the trees standing out against the clear, blue sky looked as if wrought in silver; whilst the lower ones shaded off gradually into softer and more subdued tints, forming a pleasing contrast to the grass outspread beneath, which was lighted up here and there by gleams of sunshine.

Many a man would have been content to throw himself down at the foot of one of the fantastically-shaped trunks, and thus enjoy nature and his cigar; but Herbert was too glad of the rare opportunity for exercise afforded him by his holiday to care to stay still, and wandered on till he came to a rocky torrent-bed, where several women were succeeding in making a maximum of splashing with a minimum of water, washing and wringing out linen, some chattering, some singing, all as busy one way or the other with their tongues as with their hands.

Herbert stood still for a moment, curious to watch the customs of the country, and the way of soaping and pounding the linen, which must needs have been strong to stand the handling it received. The women paused to say riverita; and Herbert took off his hat and uttered a not very confident buona sera, coupled with a question as to where the path led. His Italian had been afforded little scope for practice of

late years, and therefore stood in need of being rubbed up.

However, the women understood him, and one lifted her soft, gazelle-like eyes shyly for a moment from her employment, and told him it ended near the cross of Sant' Eustorgio.

Then he thanked them, and lifting his hat, again sauntered on, whilst the talkative group began to chatter afresh, interspersing their conversation with sundry remarks and speculations concerning him.

Merry, bright-eyed, garlic-loving Italian nation, how fascinating it is despite of its many imperfections.

And now, whilst the peasant women pass Herbert in review, let us briefly do the same. It is some time since we devoted a portion of our space to the contemplation of my hero, and he has altered somewhat again since then. His face has grown yet more expressive, and there is a look of strength and power about him which would cause others besides these simple country folks to single him out for remark. Yes, even the last year has worked its change in him, and the lessons of the past weeks have come home. It would only be the quick eyes of love which would easily recognise him without having known him since those boyish days when he was so full of high ideals and enthusiasms, yet hardly knew his own mind.

He has, indeed, 'beaten his music.' Seeking to do the Holy Will, he has learnt the divineness of the doctrine.

If Marley Priory were once more his,

he would take his place in the county with honour, and be truly useful there. cian though he is, and heart and soul artiste by nature, he nevertheless has his well-matured opinions concerning the government of his country, and pressing questions of the day, and has learnt to see that there is a patriotism above all party names, and that while Conservatism may have its prejudices, Radicalism undoubtedly possesses many extravagances. come to him, in short, that the wild dreams of his youth may not have been without their elements of beauty; but the application of these, to the existing state of things, might produce hopeless anarchy and confusion. Am I causing your sympathy for him to fade, when I confess he has become aware, that a via media in most things, savours neither of cowardice nor

illogicalness, but the contrary? I hope not; for it seems to me we are too often ready to push our conclusions not to logical, but illogical extremes, and are not brave enough to let 'our moderation be known unto all men,' not large-hearted enough to seek to occupy a lofty, central position, from whence we can keep many aspects of the truth in view.

But there only remain to us a few lines to devote to Herbert; let them be so.

As an English churchman, he can cooperate heartily with those of diverse views, and see the good in evangelicalism, ritualism, and broad-churchism (for has not the last also its 'isms'?); yet he does not care entirely to identify himself with any of these, having learned a truer catholicity, even the universality of the Father's Love. Yes; my hero, despite of eccentricities and faults, and I do not attempt to deny he has both, has turned out something worthy of being called a man. Of late, too, his mind has grown sufficiently settled for him to think of venturing to seek out Blanche once more and ask her to be his wife. His worldly prospects have altered sufficiently for the better, for him to be able to hope that Colonel Stapeleton's prejudices may be overcome; and even if this is not done at once, let Blanche only be of one mind with him, and they, who have been faithful so long, will live down a little opposition.

He finds his thoughts reverting more and more to her, instead of less and less, as time goes on; and this particularly in leisure moments, or when playing any music which stirs him, sweet, solemn music by some old master, or some simple, touching air; of course, too, at the sound of his own air composed for 'Cleansing Fires.' Again and again the vision of that evening in the old hall at Marley, when she sang it specially for him, has risen up before him. He can think of it, till it almost seems as if he hears her singing it once more.

As he wanders along the olive-terrace, such musings fill his mind; and it seems to him as if her voice again reached his ear, not in a dream this time, but in reality, so distinctly does he hear the words—

'I shall know by the gleam and glitter
Of the golden chain you wear,
By your heart's calm strength in loving,
Of the fire you have had to bear.'

No; it cannot be a fancy; it is too distinct for that. Someone must be singing

Miss Procter's lovely poem to his own music. Only, it is strange, for he has never published it; and what English person would there be to know it in this out-of-the-way spot? Yet it is an English voice he hears, and deceptively like Blanche's.

The wood grows thinner. There is an opening amongst the trees, through which Herbert catches a glimpse of a time-worn stone cross.

He passes out of the wood, and stops, spell-bound.

There, close by the cross an English lady, unmistakably English from her dress, is seated sketching the distant hills. Her face is bent over her work, and her hair gleams like burnished gold in the sunlight. Undoubtedly she is the singer; more than that she is Blanche. Hearing footsteps,

she lifts her head; a look of utter amazement passes over her face, rapidly giving place to one of intense joy. She gazes for a moment, then her lips part to murmur,—

- 'Herbert.'
- 'Blanche, my darling! to think that I have found you.'

I know not what become of picture and paints, as he comes forward and takes her in his arms; but I don't think Lady Mackenzie will ever get that drawing.

Is their behaviour strange? Should they be distant at first, and begin by many explanations? If so, you must put it down to the sweet unreasonableness of love.

But, for myself, I think many words are not needed. They simply feel they are given to each other again.

Let us leave them beneath Assunta's cross, where a faithful woman found in death alone the reunion with her loved one; but where *they* can fittingly renew their troth with a fair promise of days of happiness together, even here on earth.

It is well to leave them thus. Scenes like this bear no lengthy recounting; for their pathos lies in something deeper than we can yet express, and the chief actors in them feel it most. What they have to tell each other can only be falteringly uttered, not told in well-chosen sentences; for their hearts are too full for the words to come.

Doctor Mackenzie had once told Herbert that, even as the first Gethsemane was an olive-garden, bearing fruit for the healing of the nations, so each heavy trouble would prove fraught with heavensent emblems of peace to those who bore it trustfully, and be their little share in the world's redemption. So this brave man and woman must find that the past years have been to them.

We leave them happy; is not that enough?

If you want to know more concerning them, it must be told at some future day, when there may also be some details to add about others mentioned in these pages, who have only been sketchily noticed here, because they needed only to appear so far as their lives were bound up with those of my hero and heroine.

THE END. 4

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